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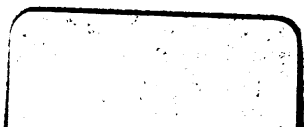
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Wylie

CHILDREN OF STORM

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TOWARDS MORNING

THE SHINING HEIGHTS

**HOLY FIRE:
AND OTHER STORIES**

CHILDREN OF STORM

BY

IDA A. R. WYLIE

1885-

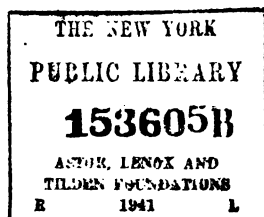
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CHILDREN OF STORM

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PROLOGUE

THEY walked gravely hand in hand, like children in the presence of something beyond their understanding. But they were not afraid. Both of them had travelled too long and too far in a world where the ordinary values had been discounted. Sorrow and loss were commonplaces. There was only one terrible thing that could come to a man or woman. And that was fear.

The autumn sun had just shown above the horizon, and behind the stark, black stems of the forest trees glimmered an unearthly fire. The very mystery of life itself was in the chill, sweet air, and the two hushed their voices so that they sounded scarcely louder than the rustle of the fallen leaves under their feet and the drowsy stirring of the unseen, living things about them.

The girl lifted the man's hand and kissed it, and he in turn kissed her's. They were both young, and it was a symbol of their reverence for each other and for all that was between them.

"Five days!" she said, scarcely above her breath. "I never meant them to end—I was going to hold tight to them—but they've gone. They were too perfect. But whatever happens we shall have had them, shan't we? No one can take them from us." She threw the earth-old defiance at fate with a fine lift of the head. "I shall always be proud that we were able to be so happy."

He nodded dreamily. "It's been like that with us from the start. Nothing that hasn't been fine and good. Nothing—sort of—to regret. I used to read in books about people like us. I used to wonder if things like that really happened. I never thought they would happen to me. And it's only the beginning——"

"Do you believe in God, Adam?"

"Yes, Ursula, I do—now."

"One must, I think. I used not to. It seemed difficult to believe in life beyond death. And now one can't believe in anything else. Perhaps immortality only comes to people who love as we do."

"It would be of no use to anyone without love," he said.

The end of the forest path was in sight. They could see the broad, white road that led to Paris—Paris that was the gateway through which he had to pass. He stopped and faced her, his hands tense upon her shoulders.

"I want you to remember what I say to you," he said. "I am coming back. I don't mean in the spirit or anything of that sort. I mean—as I am now. I promise you that I will come back. These five days aren't the end. They're just the beginning. Things have only begun to come true. They can't stop now. I promise you—I promise if there is a breath left in my body—I will come back."

She smiled faintly but believingly. "Are you so sure?"

"Yes," he answered. "I am sure—like that."

They kissed each other, at first with an austere restraint and then with a passion that mounted higher and higher, blotting out past and future. They drew back quickly from each other, like people who have come suddenly within sight of danger.

"We must get on," he said brokenly.

Where the path led out on the high road a military car waited for him. The soldier driver saluted impassively and held open the door. Adam Brodie clambered in.

"On time, Weston?"

"Yes, sir. Ten minutes to the good."

"That's fine. Mustn't be late for the war, eh?" He leaned over the car toward her, smiling with the flippant, heroic cheerfulness that four years had taught him. "Well, cheero! We'll have that dinner at the Ritz three months from now. It's a promise."

She laughed back at him. Behind her were generations of tradition.

"I shall be waiting for you."

They held each others hands for an instant.

"Righto, Weston!"

She did not wait to see him out of sight. She turned and walked resolutely back the way that they had come together—bearing in her heart the knowledge that they would meet again.

CHAPTER I

1

HE had been expecting it for the last eight hours—ever since day-break—but the disaster had delayed so long that now it came as something terrible and unforeseen. It woke him violently out of the state of stupor into which he had been sinking. It filled him with a furious, active despair.

He kicked the figure sprawling in the mud. He beat it with his clenched fists.

"Oh, get up!" he said. "Get up!"

He kicked again and again, feebly, economizing with his strength, yet cunningly so that each blow told. And all the while he chanted a galling derisive chant in a broken falsetto which sounded a long way off and unfamiliar.

"You skulking, white-livered rabbit, get up!"

The man at his feet wriggled and lifted himself on his elbow. He made an attempt to wipe the mud off his face with his sleeve, but the mud was all over him, and he only succeeded in rubbing more of it into his mouth. He choked and spluttered and began to sob wretchedly.

"I can't——" he said. "I can't——"

"You've got to," Brodie asserted in his ridiculous voice. "You're not a kid——"

He jerked his companion to his feet and they went on as before—as they had done ever since Powys had

shown signs of breaking up, with Brodie in the rear, driving at his heels. For his own sake he was glad to be out of sight. But apart from that, he did not want Powys to see his face and so to know how bad things were. Brodie's mouth, which was full and sensitive, would have given him away, as it had always done. As a boy, when he had been thrashed, he had thrust out his obstinate chin and his eyes had remained dry to the bitter end. But he had never mastered his mouth. Whatever he had felt of pain or grief or humiliation, it had revealed. It quivered now and slow, unprecedented tears rolled down his cheek. Partly it was because he had not eaten at all for two days and not sufficiently for many months, and because he was physically almost at the end of everything. But also it was because of Powys. There was something frightfully pathetic about Powys. He was a brave, long limbed, broad-shouldered fellow. A born comrade. And now his body too had betrayed him in its own way—played him false so that there was nothing left of his manhood. Brodie felt as though he were driving a broken-hearted child at the end of a bayonet.

And it was all of no good. The vast, sodden plain encircled them in a nightmare. They went on and on and got no further. There were no landmarks—not a house or tree or hillock—nothing but the road which was not so much a road as the trail of some slimy monster. It had been raining on and off for a week and the ruts and holes were pools of water which winked malevolently in the sickly twilight. The mud was horrible. It sucked at the feet of the two men with filthy lips. In those light-headed yet strangely lucid intervals which came to him more and more frequently when he broke through the appearances of things and their reality,

Brodie knew that beneath the mud was a secret unthinkable life which had set itself patiently, greedily to their destruction. And as time wore on all the varied aspects of their struggle became merged into this one enemy.

There were deep ditches on either side of the road. They were so deep that even standing on their edge it was difficult to see the bottom of their shadows. They were like trenches—or like open graves set end on end. Once or twice Brodie thought how useful they would have been.

But more often he thought about food—seeing it in front of him so vividly that only the lurking terror of madness kept him from stretching out his hand. There was one steak in particular that made him suffer almost beyond endurance—brown and red and juicy it was—with onions—as his mother had fried it for him on that last night. And a frothing mug of beer . . . He began to wonder whether he would tell Powys about it and share it with him—or keep it to himself. The struggle added terribly to his torment.

They had set out very differently. They had laid their plans with a fine mingling of daring and caution. They were to have travelled by night—ten miles at least between sunset and sunrise—and slept comfortably in hiding by day. The north star and a map which Brodie had managed to conceal from his captors were to have been their guides. For weapons they had an empty revolver. As to food, it would be comparatively easy to steal from the out-lying farms and there would be vegetables in the fields. Some people lived on vegetables.

They had foreseen hardship—been cheerfully prepared to endure hardships.

Then it had begun to rain. Their one attempt at robbery had ended almost in disaster. The vegetables which

they ate as they scratched them out of the soil, produced a tearing, demoralizing nausea. For seven nights they had never seen the stars. And it had rained—rained so that Brodie had become possessed with the idea of a personal devil who made mock of them.

Now they had no plans at all. They were past thinking—almost past caring. They travelled openly—anyhow—by daylight. But luck who, when they had counted on her had turned from them, stood by them in their indifference. Whenever danger threatened she had a hiding-place ready at hand for them. In an ironic mood she granted them mercies they no longer prayed for. The time came when Powys at least cursed their luck, longing for the end. But Brodie clung stubbornly to his will. Even when he forgot where he was going and what he was trying to do, his will swung steadily towards its pole. He knew that he must go on.

Now the plain held them in its open hand. It seemed to hold them up to derision as they crawled pitifully across its desolation. It blew bitter, rain-soaked breath among their bones. They could not hide from it. They had fled their fellow creatures and now their loneliness had become terrible. At first it had comforted Brodie to see Powys just in front of him—but now Powys seemed to be losing his personality. He was less human—just a poor, blind instinct struggling out of the slime towards nothing.

2

Suddenly Brodie stopped. The moment he stopped the mud laid faster hold of him as, though it said: "You see, now I've got you!" He dragged his feet free, violently, and catching Powys by the arm, forced him to the ditch and over the edge. The two men slid down to the bottom in silence. There the mud became a quagmire in which they floundered wildly like panic-stricken cattle, the slime sucking and slobbering about their knees, till Brodie found firmer ground. He pushed Powys down in front of him.

"You wanted to rest," he panted. "Well, rest then and keep quiet."

He himself waited a moment, peering over the edge of the ditch and listening. Powys had collapsed at once. He lay just as he fell, sprawled out, anyhow, obliterated. Brodie had seen men like that at the bottom of a captured trench.

After a few minutes he knelt down, huddling close to his companion's side. He covered his face with his arms. In the darkness he saw a picture of a little boy caught pillaging among his father's groceries and hiding his face in the self same way—as though the rest of his small guilty person had been concealed thereby. Brodie remembered that the ostrich-like stratagem had not availed much. Yet there had been sound instinct in it. For the human face has its own light. The eyes are magnets.

At first there was nothing to be heard but the distressful rising of a night wind. Then Brodie caught an irregular thud, the sog and squelch of heavy feet, the angry jolt of wheels in the deep ruts. The sounds came nearer, melting together into a harsh, painful symphony.

They came so close that they seemed to threaten to spill over and swamp the gaping ditches on either hand. Brodie could not tell how long it was before they began to fade again. The last glimmer of grey daylight was in the west as he scrambled stiffly to his feet. He could just see the black column of men winding its way into the night. A horseman had detached himself from the rest. He was just a shadow, small and indefinite, and yet Brodie caught the impression of a man riding with his chin sunk upon his breast. There was a spectral melancholy about the figure—almost a grandeur—so that Brodie did not move till he too went down with his companions into darkness.

"Well, we're on a main road going somewhere," Brodie muttered. "—if only I knew where." He touched Powys on the shoulder. "Better be moving on," he said.

But Powys huddled closer into himself.

"No——" he said. "No—— I'm damned——"

This time Brodie did not kick him. He knew that Powys did not care any more whether he was kicked or not. He had got beyond pain or shame. He just wanted to be left alone.

"Rough luck," Brodie meditated, watching the advancing wall of cloud. "Only married seven days before the last stunt. That's why I wanted to get back. Couldn't have stuck it all this time if it hadn't been for that——"

"Well—get on——" Powys answered thickly. "Get on——"

Brodie dragged his feet clear of the rising mud.

"No," he said. "I'm your officer. It isn't done. There are things I'd do to get back—most things—but not that. An officer and a gentleman, you know——" He stopped, aware that he was getting light-headed and

saying things that he did not want to say. "So there you are," he finished abruptly.

Powys stirred a little.

"Well—seeing I don't want you——"

"I don't care what you want. I'm thinking about myself. I'm not going to be 'aunted all my life." He heard the aspirate slip but without concern. It always happened to him when he reached a certain point of fatigue or emotion. Aspirates were not in the blood though all the Brodie family knew about them and, to a certain extent, cultivated them. Adam Brodie himself did not care much at any time and now he did not care at all. "Well, if you can't, you can't," he said finally and quite cheerfully.

He stood with his hands thrust into the pockets of his soaking great coat and watched the night sky with the cool anxiety of a pilot in bad seas. The weather had, in fact, begun to change. The dark stillness of the last week was breaking up before a brilliant, bitter wind which swept the swamped plain like waves of invisible cavalry. Brodie's clothes stiffened on him, his blood seemed to recede from his limbs. But he was glad of the wind. He could feel it cutting and slashing its way among the clouds, harrying them, carving a high dome out of them, chasing their sorrowful, hopeless oppression to the horizon. It struck sparks in the blackness which burnt brighter and clearer as the last vapory curtain was rent asunder. There was Orion at last sinking already westwards, then the North star itself—splendid and immutable.

Brodie drew a long breath. He saluted the North star solemnly. There appeared to be no hope left and yet he had never given up hope. He was simply unable to give way. His will which did not seem to care at

all how much he suffered, stood on one side, silently, and ruthlessly working its own purpose.

"A stiff-necked, unchristian spirit," Mrs. Brodie had been wont to say darkly of her only son.

Adam Brodie made a hole in the mud-bank so that he could lift himself up to a wider view of the plain. He had to dig his nails in the spongy clay to keep his footing and the wind lashed the tears into his eyes.

"There's a light now——" he remarked. "——'bout half a mile off . . . Doesn't move either. Must be a house of sorts. Well——, I dunno—— but I'd risk something to get a roof over my head. Anything better than sticking here like half-drowned rats——"

But he made no appeal. He might have been talking to himself. He began to whistle between his teeth and Powys wriggled angrily on his mud-bed like somebody who is being shaken out of a deep sleep. He muttered and sat up, shaking his head from side to side in fretful resentment.

"Oh damn you—damn you—why the hell don't you let me bide?"

Brodie did not seem to hear. He clung stolidly to his post. All the Brodies were superstitious or religious or both and the warm-blinking point of light meant a great deal to him. It was a kind of signal from the gods above the arena. He was sure now that he could not be beaten.

"'Bout half a mile—easy," he calculated.

"Damn you!" Powys repeated in his goaded whisper.

Then suddenly he scrambled to his feet. His teeth chattered and he groaned and staggered like a drunken old man, but in the end he stood straighter than he had done for the last two days. "Oh, give me a leg up, then," he said. "I'm game."

The interlude between silence and storm was over before Adam Brodie had put the bitterness of that last effort behind him. Clouds of a new temper had come up before the wind-wild, black legions of rearing horses and storming chariots, monstrous Armadas with sails spread that swept the open sky, riding down the stars in their unknown course. And as the earth grew darker the point of golden light ahead brightened. It stared into the hurricane with an ironic severity. It gave the low, dimly visible hovel the look of a one-eyed face, watchful and enigmatic.

The gate, hanging on its broken hinges, stood half open. It had an air of indifference as though it could no longer withstand intrusion and had nothing to protect. Brodie staggered through under his burden and across the empty yard. The filth of long neglect slipped under his feet and there was an evil smell of rot and refuse hanging over the ground like a mist which the wind could not dispel. The storm itself seemed to sweep aside from the place, as from a thing bewitched and beyond its power.

Brodie beat at the house-door with his fist and the light wavered and then burnt steadily again as though someone had been startled and now stood quiet and breathless, listening. Brodie slipped Powys from his shoulders. He flung his weight against the rotten wood-work and the lock yielded weakly. He saw then a little old woman, standing opposite him, looking at him. She had evidently sprung up from the bed against the wall and had wound one of its wretched blankets about her shoulders. She did not seem afraid. Her hands, crossed over her sunken breast, were quite steady. Her eyes

were turned in Brodie's direction but they had a distant expression. They seemed to be intent on something just behind him in the darkness.

Brodie dragged his companion across the threshold and slammed the door against the wind which was driving the light about the room like a hunted spirit. Then he lost consciousness. The tumult and struggle had been an opiate which had hidden him from himself. Now in the sudden quiet his exhaustion felled him with the force of a hammer-blow. But his will remained. It kept him upright and open-eyed, through the long, black minutes. When they passed he saw that the old woman had not moved.

"Kamerad!" he said, lifting his hands and laughing.

She did not seem to hear him. She was incredibly old. An impatient corruption had already laid hand on her, so that the face peering out from the grey wisps of hair was hardly more than a skull. Her eyes were dissolved into lightless little pools. And the room was a shadow of herself. Everything that made life decent had been stript from it. There was nothing left but the empty iron stove, a table and the truckle-bed with its disordered heap of dirty clothes. A ladder went up through a trap-door in the ceiling but there was no sound over head.

Brodie crossed to the lamp, which was still smoking. When he had trimmed it to his satisfaction he took a little book from an inner pocket of his coat and began to turn over the leaves with stiff, mud-caked fingers.

"English—Gefangenevs—" he said over his shoulder. He resumed his search methodically. "Escaped—entschlupfen—entgehen—seems you can take your choice. That's it. Englisch Gefangenevs entschlupfen—" He pointed to Powys who still lay quiet and uncon-

scious against the door. "Mein freund—krank—hier bleiben—And if you give us away—ich schiessen—sie—Todt. Understood?"

He showed her his revolver.

She did not answer at once. She hobbled over to Powys and peered into his face as though she expected to recognize him. She touched him with a bent forefinger, muttering to herself. "Nein, nein—Englisch—" Then she stood upright. The only ornament in the room was a faded photograph of a young man in uniform which hung crooked and dust laden on the grey wall. She pointed at it and at her forehead.

Todt—alles Todt—" she said.

Her rheumy eyes became for an instant young and hard with hatred.

Brodie had found the word "Food" in his dictionary. "Essen—" he spelt out— "—etwas essen—"

But she began to mutter in the slow, flat monotone of someone who has learnt to talk in solitude and he took the lamp and searched for himself. There was a crust of grey bread in one cupboard and two cracked and empty cups. He climbed into the loft overhead. A pile of dirty straw lay in the far corner. There was nothing else. The sordid misery of it all added itself strangely to his own burden. He felt the tears rising.

He came down again and set the lamp back in its place. The old woman was still staring up at the faded photograph.

"You'd better get back to bed, mother," he said gently. He lifted the half-conscious Powys to his feet and dragged him to the ladder. "Climb up that—" he commanded. "Then you can sleep—sleep your head off—"

The old woman watched the struggle between will and will in aloof silence. But when the two men had dis-

appeared she resumed her muttering. And once she gave a queer irrepressible little laugh.

Within half an hour Brodie had finished. He came back to her, standing very close, and looked straight into the blank, up-turned mask. There was kinship between them at that moment—with the gulf of years and race dividing them, a kind of likeness. In both nothing was left but the instinct of life, battling against odds. Brodie's own face was hollow-cheeked, dirt-smear'd, savage with a week's growth of beard. His eyes had already the fixed distraught stare of the smouldering delirium which was to light up the weeks to come.

He spoke in English, loudly and clearly. He had half forgotten that she could not understand. He knew that such was the force of his single purpose it would drive understanding into her.

"We're going to stay here," he said. "Powys is too done to move on. You must get food for us somewhere. We'll pay you. We're not going to do you any harm. Not if you play fair. But if you try to give us away I'll kill you. I've got someone waiting for me and I'm going to get home. If anyone comes here you're to keep quiet about us. If you try to get away, I'll shoot. I shall lie and watch you. I shan't sleep—" He pointed to his eyes "Nimmer schlafen—Nimmer——"

He stood silent for an instant, arrested by his own threat. It had sounded ominous, as though inadvertent-ly he had passed a terrible prophetic sentence on himself. Then he turned and climbed heavily back into the loft. Powys slept as yet and after a moment's listening at his side Brodie carried an armful of straw to the edge of the trap-door and lay down where he could watch the lower room. For a long time the old woman did not move. Her back was towards him and it was eloquent

of something elusive that he had no strength to grasp. Presently she crawled back into bed. A fleshless arm stretched itself towards the lamp, and the light, sending out wide pulsating circles of shadow in its death agony, went down like a drowned swimmer.

Amid the howl and battery of the storm Brodie heard her laugh again.

Sleep came to him many times that night. It came, deep and sweet, with the promise of oblivion. It came in waves that broke over him, carrying him off his feet, sucking him out into the depths. It came as a woman, as food and drink, as relief from pain. And each time he fought it back till the tide receded and the visions faded and he was left alone on the heights of a burning wakefulness.

Because he had seen the old woman's eyes he knew that the last spark of life in her was hatred and that she would betray them.

4

Thereafter one day was added to another as cards are added to a child's castle that grows perilously towards one inevitable end.

Powys was dying. His long body lay under its dirty covering and grew little and shrivelled with fever whilst his mind travelled to some distant place where the grass could not grow and the sun was a pale disc behind a black unbroken cloud.

"When we come back," he told Brodie almost threateningly, "we'll bring the sun down into the streets—by God we will—and there'll be green on the hill again. Yes indeed, on the Iron Mountain—where there were violets in the old days—so they say—but I didn't believe it—just old women's chatter—but I've seen them grow-

ing, ever since I've been away I've seen them——”

Brodie listened to him and to the sounds in the room beneath. Towards daybreak when Powys' voice became a fluttering breath, he roused himself from his own secret delirium and fought for him with the strength of an obsession. He had no art—no weapon to use against death—only his will that Powys should not die.

Their shelter was the outhouse of a farm which some unknown tragedy laid in ruins. The grass and tangled weeds grew over the charred walls and choked the rooms where voiceless, pathetic tokens of the old life still lingered. The wretched soil had gone back to the swamp and marsh. But just behind the cottage there was a potato patch, beyond that a strip of meadow where a lean goat won a meagre existence, and a clump of trees, bending their leafless bodies to the wind. Beyond that again nothing but flat shimmering emptiness.

In the morning Adam Brodie went out and gathered sticks for the fire and dug the vegetables which, with the goat's milk, were their only food. The milk he divided between Powys and the woman. She accepted his help as she yielded to his authority—with a resignation that became at times an enigmatic sinister enjoyment. It was as though in her worst fear of him she laughed. His answer was his silence. He spoke to her only once and that on the first day when he strung together a question to which she replied eagerly in her flat monotone. From the many words that passed him unrecognized he gathered a name, and afterwards by the dim light of their hiding place he searched the tattered, mud-stained map with a stern eagerness. There it was as she had said. Langenmarck. The nearest town. Twenty miles from the Dutch frontier. He closed the map again, with his eyes on Powys' dark, unconscious face.

For days together after that the distant highroad was filled with troops whose black, undulating line wound its way eastwards—in silence, like the passing of a shadow. But they did not come near the cottage. Then suddenly their passing ceased.

In the second week a man came to the door—a poacher with a hare which he exchanged for a few potatoes and he and the old woman stood together, talking. There was nothing then to have hindered her. Brodie crouched in the twilight of the loft, one hand on Powys' mouth, the other grasping his useless revolver, and waited. But the old woman came back alone and the man went on his way without a backward glance. All that day and all the days and nights to come Brodie watched and waited. To his distraught fancy there was nothing that could save them but his watchfulness. She feared it. He could see her shrink from his inflamed eyes as from something devilish. And once she pointed at them, muttering his threat "Nimmer schlafen—nimmer—nimmer—" in superstitious horror.

He felt that if he slept—if only for an hour—she would know and the spell be broken.

But sleep had, in fact, ceased to trouble him; even at night when the silence in the black room beneath offered release his eyes remained open, fixed in a stare that was sometimes sightless, sometimes intent on a long procession of old events—familiar faces. But in the centre of his numbed consciousness his will kept guard. When a rat rustled among the straw the blankness and the visions were swept away and he too became an alert and hunted animal. Once, as though to test him, the old woman had crept to the foot of the ladder and had struck a light by which she had seen him staring down at her. And she had crept away—whimpering. She

was so old—so miserable—so mad that Brodie had wanted to call her back. He had had a dim idea of trying to tell her that he was going mad too—that the whole thing was a wretched, tragic business and that they ought to help one another like decent human beings. But his will had become his master—a separate intelligence that had built up silence like a dam against the rising flood of delirious fancy.

So far he had given no sign of the world into which he was drifting further and further—nor had he betrayed by a word to his companions the presence of those others whom they did not seem to see. He had been Destiny to them, controlling death and hatred. With the first weakening of the barrier the end would be upon them all.

5

Slowly and reluctantly Powys became aware that somebody was talking. He was very tired and wanted to sleep and the persistent voice irritated him. He tried to lift himself up, to remonstrate, but his limbs seemed to be tied down by invisible weights and he could only move his head. He saw then that he was in a strange place—squalid and dark and wretched—and it occurred to him at once that he had been wounded and that this was some dressing station near the lines. But there was no gunfire—nothing but the quiet exasperating voice.

Immediately in front of him a bright square patch had been cut out of the floor. The reflected light, whilst it filled the place with a dim visibility, fell full on the figure of a man. He was seated with his back to the wall, his arms clasped about his knees in a boyish pose, his head slightly bent as though he were looking at something just in front of him. Had it not been for his ex-

pression, which was wistful and gentle almost to diffidence, he might have been a fair-haired savage of some northern tribe. His beard was unkempt and tangled, his clothing filthy and tattered beyond recognition. Yet Powys had a dim irritating feeling of remembrance. He felt that he must have known this man when he had been younger—gaunt and hollow-eyed and mad—and had hated him and been angrily, passionately grateful.

The stranger went on talking. Powys could not make out to whom. Sometimes his voice sounded gay, half shy, half swaggering, and then again anxious and apologetic. Sometimes it seemed that he was explaining, excusing himself and then again that he was telling a story almost beyond his powers of telling. Powys who could make nothing of it, cursed him weakly but he did not hear.

"Why, of course I'm proud," he said light-heartedly. "I jolly well ought to be. Haven't I been thinking of it ever since I can remember? You silly old dad! Why, when I was a kid I used to sit on the big biscuit tin and think about the time when I'd be able to 'elp myself without getting a whacking for it. And now here I am. Why, of course I wouldn't. Not really. It's a joke, mother. It wouldn't pay much, eh? Besides I'm not as keen on biscuits as I was—though they're the very best—the very best, I assure you, Ma'am. Huntly & Palmers. Two shillings a pound. And a pound of sugar. Send it? Certainly, Ma'am. The first delivery. Well, there it is at last, anyhow. Thomas Brodie *and* Son. Looks fine. All that gold lettering. A real splash——"

"Ah, shut it—!" Powys muttered.

But the other bent forward with his face between his hands. Suddenly he had become a boy telling a tale of marvellous adventure. His eyes shone in the light. His

voice sank to a thrilling whisper—"there he is—alone. Everybody has cleared out of the way. They shout to him but he doesn't listen. He sees it coming—the girl's face—the foam on the horse's mouth. And its nostrils all blood flecked. He crouches—like a tiger—waiting. The hoofs thunder—a woman screams. It is almost on him when Adam Brodie leaps at the bridle. An awful moment. For several yards he is dragged helpless through the dust. But he clings on—he won't let go. The onlookers hold their breath. At last the panting, trembling beast yields to the iron grip. People cheer. The girl leans forward in the saddle. 'Thank you—Adam Brodie—thank you——'"

Powys moved his head restlessly from side to side.

"Don't know what you're talkin' about—" he said.

Brodie sighed. His mouth quivered into a shy, apologetic smile.

"Of course not. It's all rot. You get on with the accounts, my son. Things like that don't happen—not really—not to your sort——"

"One man's as good as another," Powys broke in feverishly, "—till he shows he is'nt, anyhow. We've been through it and we know. We aren't going to forget——"

"Just luck—dad—just luck——" Brodie declared, with fine carelessness. "The other chaps—knocked out one after another—no one left but little me to carry on—now keep your head, Adam Brodie—it's up to you—mustn't let 'em down, you know—no, not a bit—cool as you please—a sight cooler than at mess. Couldn't go wrong somehow. And the men felt it too. Made me as proud as Lucifer——" The sweat of an old excitement glittered on his forehead. He tried to laugh but the laugh failed. "And when they carried me down the trench there was the old Colonel and he sat up

on his stretcher—he was dead ten minutes later—and shouted ‘Well done, Brodie, by Gad—well done——’”

Powys struggled for his words. They were like frightened sheep, running, hither and thither, jostling one another——

“Where—where was it?” he asked at last. “Paaschen-daele? I was at Paaschendaele——”

If there was an answer he did not hear it. The square of light grew dim and the voice faded and he himself sank through a long darkness. It seemed that when he had almost reached the bottom of things a hand groped down after him and against his will—because he was unutterably tired and wanted to be left alone—drew him back to the surface. There he found the strange man kneeling beside him, his arms about his shoulders, holding him in an embrace that was at once gentle and resistless. Powys, who had suffered in that desperate return, clung to him pitifully.

“Better——?”

“Yess—yess—what happened——”

“Never mind. Just hang on. It’ll come right——”

“Eh? Where are we? You were tellin’—I forgot—what——”

But as though released from an exhausting struggle, Brodie’s arms relaxed and fell limp to his side. The need for him over, he had slipped back into that other world where Powys was a shadow among realities. He lifted his head, smiling to himself. Disfigured and distraught with suffering as he was, there was something pathetically incongruous in the simplicity of his attitude. He had the look of untried youth gazing at its first happiness.

“—I want you to understand, mother—then you won’t be hurt—you see, she’s different—I don’t know what it

is—quite different—I like it when she's in the ward. I like it when she comes near—yes, thank you, much better—much better— The girls at home giggle so, don't they? You know what I mean. So sure and steady. And the things she does for you—the beastly things she has to do—seem sort of regal and fine. Of course she's a lady—a great lady. I hadn't met a lady before——”

Powys stared up into the darkness.

“Things don't grow our way,” he said. “It's the air kills 'em—poisoned——”

“If I was asleep I'd know when she comes into the room. What's that bit of poetry I read somewhere in that prize-book for Mattis? ‘My dust would beat at her tread—’ It's like that. No, mother, I don't think we talked much, but one night when everything was quiet she came with her shaded lamp and stood beside me. And I woke up and we looked at each other for a long time——”

“There's somethin' wrong with a place where th' grass can't grow,” Powys reflected. “I hadn't thought of it before—not till I saw that hell after the bombardment——”

Brodie's hands clenched themselves. He drew himself up, straight and tense with excitement.

“—they're fine—fine—like soldiers on parade—only five minutes though—it's terrible to be wounded and helpless—a fellow can be a hero and cry—I'm going to lend a hand, Nurse Seton—that's all right, you fellows—we'll have you down, every one of you, safe as houses—steady there, Adam Brodie, steady—a stiff upper-lip——”

“Maybe people get poisoned too,” Powys muttered, “—a sort of poison gas you don't know of till it's fixed you——”

"—that you, Nurse Seton?" Brodie asked in a whisper. "Not a minute to spare, eh? And all of them down. Fine. I shall be glad we did that together as long as I live—shake hands, will you—so dark, though—it's my head—oh, my dear, my dear, I never knew——"

Powys tried to lift himself up.

"'A new heaven and a new earth,'" he exclaimed loudly as though he were addressing a meeting. "It's in th' Bible. That's what it's all about——"

"—a month afterwards, mother—in Paris. Surely you see how it was—Just those five days. We didn't tell a soul. I don't want you to be hurt. We couldn't—really. They would have spoilt things. Her people—and you—well, you all hadn't been through it as we had—you wouldn't have understood——"

Powys knew now why he could not move. He turned his head to the wall and cried silently.

"—the green trees at Fontainbleau—and that jolly little inn—and the long evening walks—Just five days. No, they're not over. I'm coming back. I promise you—I promise you—if there's a breath in my body—things have only begun to come true. I'm going back to you. It's stronger than anything in the world. They can do what they like—I'll get through. It's pulling me. Things like that can't be broken—they've got to go on—got to—stand up Powys—damn you—only twenty miles—twenty miles home——"

"You'd not think you'd want to get back to a place like that—" Powys whispered. "But you do—" In a moment of clear vision he turned his head with a choking cry "—twenty miles—then you'll be going on—you'll leave me here—that's what you're getting at——"

Brodie shook his head.

"It's in The Kings Regulations—somewhere," he said.

"An officer—sticks to his men. Besides she wouldn't want me without you——"

Their fevered voices dropped into silence. Powys groped towards his companion and his hand was taken and held strongly. He fell asleep then—like a worn out child.

But still Adam Brodie kept watch. He saw the light go out, and the long darkness, and the first grey streak of dawn through the broken rafters. He heard the rats scuttle over the loose boards and the creak of a door in the morning wind and a furtive cringing movement——

"I mustn't talk," he thought pitifully. "I mustn't talk—she mustn't know how mad I am——"

CHAPTER II

1

IT WAS a yellow morning such as only London and November together can produce to perfection. The sky, which rested on the roofs like a sagging dilapidated ceiling, was yellow. The houses and the taxis and the buses and the people in them were yellow. The people were perhaps yellowest of all, their very thoughts might have been soaked in a dirty ochre. From the top of a No. 13 bus Ursula Seton could not discover a trace of redeeming colour anywhere. Even the fat man next her who on the other occasions was no doubt rosy and possibly apopleptic, was livid—like a bilious pig, she thought impatiently. The conductress, punching her tickets and reiterating her nasal “Fzzz pliz!” with bored resignation, looked dingy, unkempt and peevish.

Altogether a drab world—a world worn thread-bare, labouring on as through sheer obstinacy.

Ursula Seton imagined an Inquisitorial scene in which, before the bell rang, she was condemned to choose a lifelong companion from the faces around her or lose her head. It was a sweet game of her own which endowed the dullest journey with excitement; it made her less dissatisfied with her own family, and any misanthropic results were balanced by the conclusion that buses had a malignant influence on the human character. She could not believe that there were really so many harrassed, ill-tempered, unlovable faces in the world.

Somewhere else, at some other time, these same people must be charming, laughing-eyed and gallant-hearted. But in the bus they relaxed. They forgot to keep the fine side of themselves uppermost. They showed how jaded and dispirited and sick of things they were.

"I'd rather lose my head!" Ursula told the Chief Inquisitor for the hundredth time.

At the same moment a gun boomed solemnly in the distance. Another answered, close at hand and on a higher note, and then another and another till it seemed as though an echo were chasing itself in wide circles round the whole city. Everyone knew the sound. A woman with a baby on the front seat half-rose and gazed over her shoulder like a hunted white rabbit looking for its hole. Then someone touched her reassuringly and she sat down again with a gasp.

The fat man turned to Ursula.

"It's all over, thank God!" he said. "Nobody's being killed any more."

He was smiling and she saw that he was not like a pig at all, he had kind, good-humoured eyes that were full of tears.

"Yes, it's eleven o'clock exactly," Ursula answered rather wildly. "It's all over."

Everyone was smiling. Magically the colour came into their faces and the light into their eyes. They nodded to one another. People came running to the windows of the houses and out on to the streets. A group of office girls cheered the No. 13 bus as it rumbled elephantinely past and waved their handkerchiefs. The fat man waved back.

"Jolly fine girls!" he said chokingly. "Jolly fine!"

Ursula nodded. She sat very still with her hands clenched, wondering what she would do next. She was

frightened of herself. She had been through many terrific, terrible and splendid moments and had been quite quiet about them. But this was the most terrific thing that had ever happened. Seven million people in the same city were thinking the same thought and sharing in one emotion. It was like the rush of an avalanche or the sweep of wind over the strings of some immense instrument. The foundations of one's daily life shook.

Ursula got up at last. She had forgotten where she had been going and she felt that she must get down from her isolation and mingle with other people. The bus continued its career recklessly and the conductress stood against the back rail, staring in front of her as though she too had forgotten. She seemed more than ever dingy and dishevelled but her loose cockney mouth had closed into austere lines. Suddenly she realised that Ursula was waiting and their eyes met and held in the unflinching stare of people who have accidentally looked too deep into each other and are aghast. Ursula wanted to say something—one of the hot, impulsive things that were so utterly impossible from the family's point of view—but the conductress turned away.

"Well—it don't make no difference to me—now," she said.

She banged the bell with her clenched fist.

Ursula wandered aimlessly down Harley Street towards Oxford Circus. It was all so extraordinary, so dreamlike that she herself felt unreal. In a minute the grim grey houses shone with flags; immaculate housemaids, wont to trip with hushed sedateness before anxious patients, stood shamelessly on the area steps, laughing and chatting, waiting as though for some great procession to roll past. Instead a policeman on a bicycle and blowing "All Clear" on his bugle, swerved out of

Wimpole Street and received their ovation blushing. The gay, singing notes sounded very sweet. They had always meant the end of a night of terror. And now there was to be no more terror.

Ursula felt tenderly towards the policeman and to all the smiling, nodding women. She felt that she belonged to them and they to her. All differences were melted into a splendid unity. A secret bond had been forged in those four years and no one who had lived through them could ever be quite alone again.

Ursula came out into Oxford Circus. But the first moment was over and the sturdy humour of the crowd had begun to sweep away its delicate emotion as a boisterous wind blows away a mist. Shop windows closed as though unseen impish hands had rushed the shutters to their places. A surging, whirling stream of men and women, great Army lorries packed to the brim with khaki, buses swaying and top-heavy with shouting, gesticulating passengers, taxi-cabs ruthlessly commandeered and groaning under their captors who crawled agilely like excited flies over their backs and roofs—all rushing in passionate haste from nowhere to nowhere. The clang of bells, the bang and raucous hooting of impromptu musical instruments, cheers, cat-calls, the blare of trumpets, a dazzling, deafening kaleidoscope of sound and colour—the outpouring of an artless, inarticulate people.

Ursula tried to remember old London—the old London of that long ago time before the war—and could not. It seemed more unreal even than this fantastic city of fantastic citizens. It was more in keeping with all that had happened that men and women should go mad in their joy, fling laws to the winds and dance and sing their way down through the grave tradition haunted

streets to the tune of every freakish fancy. The four years had been mad too. The London of stolid respectability, middle-aged, invulnerable, stiff with convention, inert with self-confidence, stupid and lovable above all cities in the world, had nothing to do with them. It had not fought for its life. It was a fairy-tale city and many of those who had lived in it had vanished with it into mist.

Ursula went where the crowd took her. It seemed to her that already the majority had forgotten why they cheered and sang and that they were simply doing the things they often wanted to do when they were happy but which were never allowed to them. But among them there were also people who walked gravely, with uplifted heads and far-seeing eyes. They held the strings of continuity in their hands and remembered the four years and looked into the years that were coming. They seemed neither happy nor unhappy. They were the people who had learnt in bitterness to be patient.

Ursula looked at them shyly. She loved the noisy, good-humoured crowd, but it seemed to be drifting further and further away from her. Already she was losing touch. But when she passed the quiet people she grew warm again with the sense of unity. Most near and living of all were the streets and the buildings and the dingy statues. Of the latter Ursula had used to think scornfully when she had thought of them at all. Dead and gone people immortalized by artists who had better never have been born. But now as she came to them she lingered and read their names and their great deeds and looked up tenderly at their sooty features. There were statesmen in old fashioned frock-coats with scrolls in their hands, generals resting on sword hilts, explorers wrapped in their arctic furs and kings pranc-

ing on impossible horses. There was one sailor hero perched so high that no one could see him at all. He stood aloof and lonely and kept watch on the horizon with his one eye whilst the lions in their turn guarded his isolation. There was Richard Coeur de Lion at last with lifted sword, riding gallantly at the head of his ghostly army of Crusaders. Of them all he had been for Ursula the most unreal—a legendary figure connected with history lessons and dates and someone called Blondel who sang ballads. But now she felt that he had really lived. They had all lived—their poor statues had even now a mysterious, potent life of their own. Ursula fancied that in their way they communed together over the heads of the people who had forgotten them, not wounded by their neglect, but proud and satisfied. "It is well done," they said—"Well done after all——"

And Ursula felt that she belonged to them and they to her and to the crowd and to each other—right down through generations and generations of Englishmen who had fought and toiled and muddled through for England.

For the first time she was comforted and at peace.

2

The policeman smiled down at Ursula. He was the only policeman she had been able to find and he was like the last upstanding pillar of law and order in a tottering civilization. His attitude towards the crowd was tolerant and disdainful, but he smiled at Ursula rather wistfully as though she too were a remnant of things as they had been and should be and might never be again.

"It's a long way from here, Miss," he said. "I doubts

if you ever gets there. Bus 40 used to do it but wot Bus 40's doing today no one knows. You don't live out that way, do you, Miss?"

"No," Ursula said. "I've never been there before."

"Then I'd leave it if I was you. Even if you managed it, it'd be late before you get back and the streets tonight'll be no place for a young lady like you. Things hav'n't begun yet——"

"I don't mind that," Ursula answered. "I'm not afraid. They're just jolly and happy, ar'nt they? And there's someone out there I want to see——"

"Won't it do another day, Miss?"

"No—it's today—today particularly——"

The crowd jostled her against the policeman and the policeman steadied her with a fatherly solicitude. He did not attempt to dissuade her any more. He stared stolidly over her head as though he were watching for something and she had an absurd conviction that he knew all about her and her queer irresistible impulse and in his burly way was sorry——

"We must see what we can do about it then," he said.

She waited patiently because she had confidence in him, and presently he stepped out into the middle of the street. Bus 40, swerving round the corner, law defying, drunken with victory but taken unawares, yielded to the habit of a life-time. It jerked to a standstill and the policeman helped Ursula on board.

"The Crown & Anchor," he said. "Second turning on your left. Good luck, Miss."

She looked back at him from the bus top. And because he struck her suddenly as a forlorn, pathetic figure she waved to him. It was the sort of thing Ursula Seton did and it troubled her family a good deal.

3

"The Crown & Anchor" was a four-penny ride through unfamiliar streets of little shops and little timid houses that wore an air of being afraid of life and of keeping very close together so that a jealous fate might not take notice of them. They wore flags in their front windows but noisy rejoicing was both beneath them and above them. Only the very poor or the very rich can afford to be reckless and the people who lived in the little houses and made a living in the little shops were neither rich nor poor but only respectable.

Their respectability weighed thickly on the atmosphere. It depressed Bus 40 which long before it reached its destination had discharged its rowdy cargo and now rumbled along at a decent pace, shame-faced and self-conscious, like a portly Alderman caught in an undignified frolic. No one could have guessed from the bus-conductor's demeanor that he had been blowing kisses to every bus-conductress on his route.

"Edgberton Street—second on your right," he said to Ursula coldly and repressively as though he did not at all approve of her.

It was now close on three o'clock and the yellow sky had dropped a little lower, trailing its tattered skirts over the chimneys and threatening to collapse wholesale into the streets. It began to rain, but Ursula did not know that it was raining. She walked very slowly, looking about her, remembering things. She had never been in the neighborhood before, had hardly realized the existence of such a neighborhood except through the medium of novelists who went in for stories of suburban life, yet she felt she knew every stone, every scrubby little tree in the double file of trees that tried so valiantly

to grow into an avenue, every shrub in the absurd gardens in front of the absurd gabled houses, with their absurd high-sounding names. There was Tan-y-balch where the kind old Welshman lived and across the way Valhalla, the home of the Smiths who were great Wagnerites and went to Covent Garden at least once a year and had had their window broken on the baseless suspicion that they were pro-Germans, and just at the corner "Mon Repos"—very disagreeable people lived there and on winter evenings the small boys of the neighborhood had been wont to ring their bells as a regular pastime. Ursula knew them all—even to their flower-pots posed exactly in the windows between the symmetrical white curtains—and they did not seem to her little or mean or absurd. Unfamiliar as they were in fact, they shone in the softening light of an old memory. Each stone and house was sanctified because out of it all had come something splendid—much courage, much fine faith.

She held her head high so that the sudden tears should not brim over.

Edgberton Street was a side street full of shops. Not very large or prosperous any of them—they looked as though the big stores further west had almost squeezed them out of existence—but honest and painstaking like the people they served. It seemed that you could buy anything in Edgberton Street. There was a butcher and a greengrocer and a fishmonger and a little-of-all-sorts shop and right at the far end—just where she had always seen it—a grocer's.

Ursula stood on the opposite pavement and read the inscription over and over again to herself.

"Thomas Brodie & Son—& Son—& Son," till her heart ached. She saw how proudly the "& Son" had been painted in. It was brighter than the rest as

though it had been repainted quite recently. A Union Jack hung at a window on the first floor but it was already soaked in the drizzling rain and hung mournfully. It seemed to Ursula the saddest thing in the world.

Suddenly she crossed the street and gently, as though she were afraid of waking someone, pushed open the narrow double doors with their advertisement-plastered glass panes. She knew beforehand just how the bell overhead would ring. It had a loud, clamorous voice and seemed to shout "Take care, here's another intruder!" like a disagreeable watchdog. Ursula felt that she had known it all her life.

It was very still in the little shop. The neatly ordered stores drowsed in a yellow melancholy which had already begun to creep out of its lurking place in the far corners, and to rise stealthily towards the low white-washed ceiling. Out of it the tins and glass-cases twinkled sleepily. At first it seemed a prosperous little shop in its quiet way. Everything was in its place and shone with cleanliness, and fresh sawdust had been strewn so recently over the floor that not a foot-mark showed. But as Ursula stood by the counter waiting, she saw that the wonderfully balanced chocolate boxes and the pyramids of OXO and the geometrical design in biscuit tins were an elaborate fake. They were all empty. It was all a pretence—a gallant make-believe. The place was just a husk of something that had once been. The life had gone out of it.

Still there was the coffee bin in which a round-headed, fair-haired boy had once hidden from retribution and the big barrel of apples—now empty—which had yielded him the richest plunder. There too under the broad shelf was his robbers cavern where he had mused pensively on the consequences of crime or imagined himself

a desperately wounded, besieged and defiant brigand. It made Ursula smile unsteadily to see how exactly her picture of it all had been.

A door opened in the rear of the shop and against the pale light of a back window Ursula caught a glimpse of a living room and of three human shadows. She could not see their faces but she felt that one was a little old man at the square table with his head between his hands, reading, or perhaps sleeping. The second shadow moved hither and thither busily. The third came down the steps into the shop—a slow, heavy-moving shadow that suggested something sure and indomitable.

“Yes, Miss, and what can I do for you?”

Ursula put her hand on the counter to steady herself. Then she looked up. She saw opposite her a short, square built woman in a black serge dress and black alpaca apron, who watched her with steady, dispassionate eyes, waiting for her to answer. But everything that Ursula had planned to say was gone. She felt lost and helpless like someone who misses a familiar landmark. There was nothing there of all that she had expected to find—only the dogged, thrust-out jaw—the look of steady purpose.

“Yes, Miss?”

“I don’t know—I’m sorry.” She gave a shaken laugh that sounded horrible and silly in her own ears. “I must have been dreaming—sugar—yes, sugar, half a pound, please——”

“You’re not registered with us, are you, Miss?”

“No, of course not. I was forgetting. I meant biscuits—if I could have biscuits——”

The square white face peered disapprovingly through the dusk.

“You can have half-a-pound, Miss. We don’t allow

more to chance customers. Biscuits are hard to come by and not much when you get them. Not what they used to be." She moved heavily to the back of the shop and Ursula heard the opening of a tin and the scuffle of thin paper. "It's this war—this wicked war."

"It's over now," Ursula said gently.

"It's been over for some of us these many months."

"Yes," said Ursula. "I know——"

Mrs. Brodie came back to the counter with the biscuits in a paper bag and weighed them out in the old fashioned scales. The hand wavered and she broke a biscuit in half to make the measure exact. "I don't hold with all this flag-waving," she said. "I didn't want our flag hung out, but my husband would have it. It ain't right or Christian to wave flags just because millions of folks have gone as'll never come back."

"It's not that," Ursula answered with a low eagerness. "It's because they've won—it hasn't been for nothing that they went—surely that's why."

Mrs. Brodie stood square and stolid, staring in front of her, with the fragment of biscuit in her hand.

"I don't know what they've won," she said, as though she were talking to herself. "I don't know, I'm sure. Twenty years Mr. Brodie and me moiled and toiled to build up this little business till there wasn't a shop ten miles round as could touch us for prices *nor* quality. People used to say 'Get it at Brodie's. You'll be sure then'. Now there are things here on this very counter I wouldn't 'ave allowed in the shop—no, not at any price. And look at this——" she picked up one of the empty boxes and set it down again disdainfully. "Sham—that's all it is—sham everything."

"It'll come right——"

"Not for some—not for us. We're old people and

we've had a hard pull. We can't start afresh." She threw the half biscuit back into the box with a kind of bitter indifference. "That's wot war does. It's queer to think it takes millions of dead young folk to make such a mess of everything. Twenty years moil and toil gone because men can't keep off each other. Well, I'd give it all up if I could, but I've never been able to give up somehow. Eighteen pence, if you please, Miss."

Ursula picked up her bag of biscuits and held it up to the yellow daylight.

"Thomas Brodie & Son—" she read. "—and Son. So there's someone to carry on after all."

"Those are old bags, Miss. Bags is scarce like everything else. We have to use up what we've got. No, it's just Thomas Brodie now."

"You mean——"

Mrs. Brodie stood back a little with her hands folded stiffly in front of her. Ursula looking at her through the dusk, thought of a square rock that the storms and tides might buffet and submerge for a hundred years and never conquer.

"My son went out four years ago, Miss. As a common Tommy he went. He was at Mons and a place called Nerve Chapel and on the Somme. He was wounded once but he didn't come home. They couldn't spare him from the Regiment, so he said. Then he was wounded again and taken prisoner—last year—and for a while he wrote regular. He hasn't written for nine months. No, it's just Thomas Brodie, now."

Ursula leant forward over the counter. It was as though she wanted to get nearer to that stoical figure—to touch her into some sort of mobility.

"Are you sure? There might be a mistake. Things like that happen. One day he might just walk in——"

"He was an officer then," the old woman said as though she had not heard. "Major Adam Brodie we had to put on the envelopes. Very queer, I thought it. He was a poor hand in the business—always dreaming."

"You must be very, very proud——"

Mrs. Brodie turned her head slowly towards the speaker. For the first time her heavy dominating voice shook with a stern, resentful grief.

"There was no call for him to go—no call. He was an only son and we had toiled and moiled for him. We made the business for him. He should have stayed. It was against my will, but he threw my words over as though they were so much breath—me, his mother. It was breaking the Law of God. Isn't it in the Bible. 'Thou shalt honour thy father and mother'."

"He had to go," Ursula interrupted. "There's a bigger law than that——"

"I don't know it, Miss. Sounds blasphemous, if you'll excuse my saying so. There's nothing in the Ten Commandments about fighting Germans or any else that I know of—except sin."

"He had to go," Ursula repeated passionately. "He couldn't have done anything else. He was the bravest man I ever knew——"

In the silence that followed she felt that the door leading into the back-room had opened wider and that the two shadows had come down the steps and were creeping nearer and nearer to her, listening. The foremost shadow was small and bowed and shuffled awkwardly. She felt a pair of hungry eyes peering at her through the gloom.

"Did you know my son, Miss?"

"Yes," Ursula said. "I was at the hospital with him in France. He was in my ward. Yes—I knew him."

She spoke gently and quietly again, her anger against the stiff, unbending woman opposite gone as swiftly as it had come. An aching sense of communion touched her instead as though in the dusk the four scarcely visible human beings had suddenly drawn near to one another, shivering, for comfort. "He used to talk to me," Ursula said, "about his home—about the shop. I seem to recognize every inch of it. There's the apple-barrel—just where I knew it would be."

"He was always mad for apples," a new voice, eager and husky, affirmed out of the shadow. "Every chance he got he nipped one. A regular little demon he was for 'em."

"It's queer he should have talked of the shop," the woman said. "He was no good in it—always dreaming."

"He tried, mother—he tried honest."

"Maybe. One has to do more than try in this life."

"He didn't just try—out there," Ursula said. But the moment's nearness and warmth had gone. There were distrusting, measuring eyes watching her out of invisible faces. She felt that the old woman's eyes must be grey and cold as stones. Something hostile had crept in between them.

"One of the nurses, you say?"

"Yes—a V. A. D."

"I've heard queer tales of them. Not all they might be, some of them—as they say."

Ursula did not answer. She made herself think of the bowed little shadow lurking behind that square inert figure. She spoke to it.

"Major Brodie and I were in the hospital together when it was bombed," she said. "It was at night and I happened to be on duty. When the alarm was given there was a kind of panic—you know it is terrible to be

wounded and helpless, and quite brave men became like children. Major Brodie had had a bullet removed from the base of the skull that same morning and was suffering terribly, but he got up and between us we carried the stretcher cases down into the cellars in the next building. The bombs were falling all round us most of the time, but Major Brodie kept on going backwards and forwards across the open. He was the last to come out—carrying a boy whose feet had been amputated. And five minutes after the ward was blown to pieces." It was very still. For a moment she had them in her hand—all three of them. And yet she had not told it as she had meant to tell it. It was so bald—the coldest statement of fact. "I don't know how he did it," she said at last. "He must have had a will of iron."

"He was always obstinate," Mrs. Brodie said. "You couldn't keep him in bed—not even with the measles."

Ursula began to laugh and checked herself.

"I came to tell you about it," she said, "in case you had not heard. I thought you might be glad to know."

"Thank you, Miss——"

"And to ask you if you—you had had news—indirect news—from his men—or a brother officer—something——"

For the first time the third shadow seemed to come out of its colourless passivity. It moved forward into the dingy light that still filtered through the upper part of the shop window and Ursula saw a girl's white and sullen face, peering at her.

"No, Miss—nothing—and if we had—you'll excuse me, Miss—but you're a stranger to us—why I've talked the way I've done—indeed, I don't know."

The girl nodded her head in a sort of fierce confirma-

tion. Mrs. Brodie took up the bag of biscuits. "You'll not be wanting these now," she said. "You needn't have troubled to pretend you wanted them. You should have said your business outright."

"I'll take the biscuits," Ursula said steadily.

"It's eighteenpence then, please."

Ursula put the money on the counter. She heard Mrs. Brodie count it and throw it jingling into the till.

"Thank you, Miss. Good evening."

Ursula turned away. She felt the hostile gaze follow her and wondered that instead of anger she should feel only this blind, choking grief. Then something moved—quickly—like something frightened but desperately determined. It came shuffling over the sawdust floor. It held the door for her. Ursula looked down. She saw a little pale faced, hairy man. The hair was white and grew in tufts on his head and cheeks and chin like balls of down. Almost comic. But there were the eyes—the authentic eyes—blue, steadfast, with the look of wistful anticipation, almost of vision. There was the nervous, over-sensitive mouth that quivered now on the verge of tears.

"Miss, if you please—a friend of my son's—anyone who knew him—who was kind to him—I'd be glad—if you wouldn't mind—to thank you—Thomas Brodie—you know—Thomas Brodie & Son—to shake hands."

Ursula took his hand and held it. They nodded at each other in wordless understanding.

Then the loud voiced, indignant bell clanged behind her.

"Well, she's gone anyhow, the baggage!"

It was raining now—raining dismally and hopelessly as though all the pent-up grief of the world had

broken. Ursula Seton hurried along the empty street, her bag of biscuits clutched in one hand and the great drops running unheeded down her cheeks.

CHAPTER III

1

IT'S THE awakening from a bad dream," the Honourable Mrs. Seton said in her soft voice. "There is no reality in it. The only reality is the spirit and nothing spiritual can be evil. Suffering and sorrow are just phantoms that one must work against with all the strength of one's soul—as we have worked. Then they vanish."

She made a little gesture with one of her beautiful hands and the movement encircled her in peace. The firelight that threw its reflection on her delicate, faded face, and the shadows of the room that framed her massively so that she seemed by contrast the more exquisite, schemed together to bear her witness. But her husband, who stood by the window listening to the muffled roar of rejoicing in the distant streets, turned towards her, with intention of protesting stoutly. "If it's been a bad dream it's our brave men who have awakened us," or some other equally patriotic and practical platitude trembled on the tip of his tongue. All he said, in effect, was—

"There may be something in your idea, Ann, though I don't profess to understand a word of it."

He came over to her side and touched her affectionately and almost cautiously as though he were afraid of hurting her.

It was always like that. At the bottom of his soul he distrusted and disliked his wife's faith. It was new-

fangled, unorthodox, perhaps revolutionary. It seemed to deny, or at any rate disparage, the foundations on which her world was built. It even made him doubtful of his own reality. He was a big man, who was secretly proud of his bigness, of the mass of white hair which the years had not succeeded in thinning, and of stout limbs which could still hold their own against youth. He liked to add himself, in fancy, to the gallery of sturdy forebears who gazed down at him with an enigmatic stolidity from the dim walls of his library. The Setons were a powerful, practical race; their feet had always been set on firm ground and Leroy Seton, their final and complete expression, inherited their traditions, their conventions, their faiths and much of their unshakable self-confidence. Only when he came in contact with his wife's ideals he lost countenance; his bulk oppressed him and he became awkward and diffident as a school-boy in touch, for the first time, much to his surprise, with things beyond his understanding.

Mrs. Seton patted his hand reassuringly.

"Just a bad dream, my dear," she repeated, smiling into the firelight.

But from the other side of the hearth her eldest daughter stirred a little, lifting herself out of the depths of her deep leather chair so that her face came palely into the subdued light.

"I don't see that it matters whether a tooth-ache is real or only a bad dream so long as it hurts," she said with a short laugh. "And anyhow what is God thinking of to give us nightmares?"

Margaret Seton resembled her mother, but the resemblance had passed through some strange alchemy which had transmuted the older woman's poetic charm into something faintly macabre. People who were fond

of clichés spoke of Margaret as an Aubrey Beardsley type and her dark sunken eyes, black hair and thin, passionate mouth, whose mobility in the midst of a gaunt pallor suggested a separate living thing, had won for her an admiration which she had not known as a robust and bright-cheeked girl. Age had touched her youth with its own peculiar fascination. Four years of living had made her older than her mother could ever be.

Ann Seton looked at her daughter wistfully.

"There are so many things that we don't understand," she said. "Why should we expect to understand God?"

"I don't," Margaret answered. "But then I don't offer to explain his vagaries."

"Margaret, dear——"

"You're not to be rude to your mother," Mr. Seton interposed firmly. He planted himself between them as though he were defending the gentle, delicate woman, rather than the Deity, from attack. "You're too young to understand these things. I'm an old man and I don't understand them myself. All I know is that it's over and Hubert's come through safe. It's enough for me."

"And mother thinks it is she who has worked the miracle through faith," Margaret remarked half to herself. For she had seen the faint, peaceful smile at the corner of Mrs. Seton's mouth and her own lips twitched with a half exasperated, half indulgent humour. Then to cut short the argument, she sprang up restlessly. "Is Ursula lost or dead, I wonder? We ought to start in half an hour and then we shall be late. Esmé warned us that it would take time to get through the mob. It's too bad of Ursula."

"Ursula did not know of the invitation when she went out to the hospital this morning," Mrs. Seton protested. "She did not even know of the armistice."

"She knows that she has to dress for dinner," Margaret retorted curtly.

Mrs. Seton had no further defence ready. Unquestionably Ursula should have known. They had always dressed for dinner—right through the blackest hours of the four years. At half past six the dressing-gong had sounded, and solemnly, in the full glory of dinner jacket and white shirt front and bare shoulders and pre-war frocks, they had sat down to their rigidly observed rations. Even when a lentil stew had been the sum total of their menu they had not faltered. Neither a sense of humour nor proportion had troubled them. They were patriots, but patriots with tradition of living that was life itself.

"I don't know what to make of Ursula," Mr. Seton reflected. "She's changed—she was never an easy child to understand and now she eludes me altogether. Goes her own way. Not that she does anything I'd wish to prevent, but she does it so that I feel it doesn't matter what I wish. Bit between her teeth, as it were. Very awkward for us. She's too quiet too—as though she were busy with something we don't know anything about. You've noticed it, Ann?"

Mrs. Seton drew herself up. Her small erect body was tense with suppressed feeling—with a subdued, exultant pride.

"Yes," she said. "And I know she has changed. Much more than we guess. She and Hubert—sometimes I feel that I don't know them any more—that they are not my children but have been reborn and gone right away from me—far above me. They know things about themselves and life that I shall never know. I couldn't blame or criticise them. Others may—but not an old woman who has stayed at home." Her voice sank as

though she had forgotten that she was speaking. "They have lived wonderfully," she said.

Mr. Seton nodded, blind with a sudden rush of tears. Since eleven o'clock he had been passing from one emotional crisis to another and had fought doggedly to hide the fact from himself and everyone else. But his wife struck straight through his clumsy armour. He could only repeat slowly and emphatically:

"That's true—Ann—that's true."

"What a fuss you all make about courage," Margaret observed, staring blackly into the fire. "One of these days you'll wake up. You'll see that people who have killed other people and gone in terror of their lives aren't any better than they were—and some of them will be a great deal worse. And you'll hate them for having made fools of you, and they'll hate you for having made gods of them." She turned, hearing the opening of the door above her father's indignant protest. "Oh, Ursula—what an age you've been."

But Ursula stood on the threshold and looked at them in silence. It was all familiar—the big square room, the shaded lights, and deep shadows, the three people as she had seen them a hundred times, her father, confident and immaculate, screening the fire, her mother, a fragile, silver-grey figure, seated in the arm-chair that always seemed on the point of swallowing her up, and Margaret, one foot on the fender, sombre and challenging in the bizarre simplicity of her black dress. And yet they filled Ursula with astonishment—almost with fear.

"Ursula, we've been waiting for you."

She came forward a few steps and Mrs. Seton's hand tightened on the arm of her chair.

"Why, dear child, you're soaked through."

"Yes, it's—it's been raining."

She took off her little fur cap and shook it so that the drops scattered over the square polished table. The dark ruddy hair hung in dank disorder about her face. She looked dishevelled, disrupted, harassed like some hunted, desperate thing.

"Ursula, what has happened? You haven't been in the crowd—they haven't been rough to you."

"Oh no—no—they were very kind—everyone tried to help me—but I had to walk—miles and miles—there were no buses—and I lost my way—and it was raining all the time."

"Well, please hurry up now at any rate," Margaret insisted. "Esmé rang up his morning. He's back on leave and he wants us all to celebrate at the Savoy tonight. Of course we're going. You've got ten minutes before the carriage comes round."

"I'm sorry—I can't come."

"Don't be silly, Ursula. You know he only asked us because of you. It would spoil everything."

"I can't—I'm too tired—too tired."

Mr. Seton interposed with the severity of a long suppressed, secretly nourished grievance. He had forgotten his recent emotion. He hated to see anyone belonging to him so untidy and so uncontrolled.

"That's not our fault, Ursula. You shouldn't have been out so long—on a day like this—it isn't right. None of us knew where you were or what you were doing. It's not considerate. In fact you consider us very little these days. It's been troubling me a great deal. You seem to have lost all sense of the fitting—of discipline—if you ever had any——"

"Roy."

"I'm sorry, father——"

"And now you must really bring a sacrifice. As

Margaret says, Esmé will be disappointed. We owe something to a man who has served his country as he has done. Besides, this is a great evening—the greatest perhaps in British history. We have suffered together—we must be happy together.”

“I can’t—I can’t.”

“Unless you have some reasonable excuse.”

“Wait,—Roy, please,” Mrs. Seton had risen quickly to her feet and stood in front of him as though she were trying to hide her daughter. “Dear—is anything wrong—you must tell us—we have a right to know.”

Ursula stood with one hand pressed down on the table. She looked towards her mother and suddenly her face quivered—puckered up into the grimace of a child about to burst into tears. It steadied again instantly into white rigidity.

“Yes—I do too—I mean—I think you ought to know—I’ve waited to tell you—for a long time—but we promised each other—unless certain things happened—well, they have happened. I can’t go tonight, mother—you see—I’m married—and I think my husband’s dead.” The controlled hysteria which made her voice harsh and broken died down as though under a sudden relief. She continued to gaze steadily at her mother from under straight, knitted brows. “I didn’t mean to tell you like this—I didn’t want to hurt you—but I’m so tired—so frightfully tired—and you wouldn’t leave me alone.”

“Married—!” Mrs. Seton whispered.

Margaret had flushed crimson. She was now whiter than her sister. Her mouth had tightened into an inflexible line.

“Hard luck on Esmé, Ursula——”

“Married—to whom—when——”

Ursula Seton turned to meet her father with lifted head.

"It was in France—at the hospital—when we were bombed—you—remember—he was wounded—and afterwards—when he had five days leave—in Paris—we were married——"

"But who—who in God's name——"

"Adam Brodie—Major Adam Brodie——"

"But who is he—what is he—the damned scoundrel——"

"You are not to talk of him like that, father. Please understand that. I won't stand it. I've been very unhappy. He's been missing for nine months—and I've had to go about—saying nothing. I can't bear any more——"

"Well—answer my question——"

They saw then that she was carrying something. It was a paper-bag, soaked with rain and as she laid it on the table it split open, spilling out a sodden heap of biscuits.

"I've been to see his people," she said. "They live in Peckham. I don't suppose you know where that is—I wanted to find out if they had heard anything—it was my last hope—I bought these biscuits at Mr. Brodie's shop——"

Margaret laughed out sharply. Mr. Seton lurched like a man who has not full control over his limbs. Suddenly he had lost his appearance of robust strength. He looked old and flabby and pitably shaken.

"Ursula—it's incredible—you can't have done such a thing——"

Smith, the parlour-maid, appeared discreetly through the open door. She carried two opera cloaks over her arm and her expressionless voice seemed to reassure them

all as to the impossibility of what had happened. Even Ursula wondered if it were really true.

"If you please, sir, the carriage——"

Mr. Seton nodded. The training of a life time re-asserted itself. No scenes. Not before one's inferiors anyhow. He helped his wife into her wraps, crushing her fluttering protest by the sheer weight of authority. For once he dominated her. This was his business. He knew how to behave under disaster. It was traditional. There was no religion in this.

"We must be off at once," he said. "We mustn't keep Esmé waiting. We will make your excuses to him, Ursula——"

Her mother and sister passed her in silence, with averted eyes. Mrs. Seton was crying, but Ursula did not know that. She had forgotten them all. She saw nothing but the sodden paper bag with the washed-out lettering:

THOMAS BRODIE & SON—& SON——

2

Two hours later Smith opened the front door to an old man in an old fashioned top-hat and a dark military cloak which wrapped him to the knees. Seeing him and the car lights just disappearing out of the square, Smith opened the door to its widest intent.

"Is Miss Ursula up still?"

"Yes—your Lordship, I think so. Miss Ursula was in the library a few minutes ago. If your Lordship pleases, I'll let her know."

"Don't dither, girl. If Miss Ursula's up I can find her for myself. What's the place in darkness for? Is everyone else dead?"

"The master gave the other servants a holiday, your Lordship. They're out celebrating the Armistice."

"Damn nonsense. What's it got to do with them? Why were you victimized, eh?"

"I didn't want to go, your Lordship."

"Sensible girl. No business of yours. Here's half a crown for you. Take my things now and don't dither—I hate fidgetty people." He inspected himself in the dim Venetian mirror and adjusted his evening tie with shak-ing but cunning fingers. "And don't follow me about like a poodle," he added over his shoulder as he proceeded stiffly towards the stairs.

Ursula had turned out the electric lights. The room was in darkness save for the dull glow of a dying and forgotten fire. She herself lay huddled up in her father's chair, lulled into a stupor of exhaustion, and was not conscious of another presence until, having inspected her long and intently, Lord Ivonrood coughed.

"Well, Ursula?"

She started resentfully, like a tired hunted animal that is allowed no rest, but as she recognized him she relaxed again and lay limp and inert, staring up at him with heavy shadowed eyes. "I expect I frightened you," he said with a touch of satisfaction in his small grating voice. "You weren't expecting me, were you?"

"I didn't even know you were in town, grandfather. I thought you were down in the valley."

Lord Ivonrood nodded, holding his bony hands to the fire.

"I was—this morning. I came up by special train. I had news—that brought me up unexpectedly. But about that later. Anyhow there was no time to open Berkeley Square, so I put up at the Savoy. I met your family there with Monteith—in fact, I joined them as far

as the fish. Then for various reasons I retired. I dislike people whose idea of patriotism consists in pouring champagne down each other's necks and I felt it might come to that. I know these celebrations of old. Not that our party showed any particular signs of hilarity. I thought Monteith looked like murder. Weren't you in the celebrating mood, Ursula?"

"No," she answered.

He nodded again—rhythmically, as though to the measure of a recently heard tune that still lingered in his ears. He was quite bald and clean shaven, with thin, pale-coloured eyebrows and eyelashes that did not break the white monotony of the small face and strange cone-shaped head. To strangers he seemed at first sight merely grotesque—at worst slightly repulsive—a little, abnormal man who had lived too long and could no longer conceal his abnormality. Then the sharp eyes, the narrow inflexible mouth and pointed chin predominated. They inspired dislike or fear. They struck amusement or contempt dead. He bore neither his son nor the strong-shouldered men on the library wall any obvious resemblance. But sometimes there flashed up in him either in look or gesture—a fore-glimpse of Margaret Seton, his grand-daughter—something vague and troubling like the first shadow of blight.

"No, I couldn't celebrate either," he said. "There's nothing for me to celebrate. The war has only just begun and I am an old man." He jerked up his head contemptuously. "Hark at them howling out there. There's a rumour that they've hacked pieces out of the Nelson monument. Why not? What do they know of Nelson or of any of the men who have made this country? I tell you, Ursula, we have caged one set of madmen to let loose another. All men in the aggregate are mad

and evil whether they are autocrats or demagogues." He began to tremble and sat down in the chair opposite her, his small gout-deformed hands tightly interlocked to hide their senile weakness. "Only the few are worth while—and our few are dead. The rest are wild cattle that will stampede unless someone strong enough comes to drive them. They'll go over the precipice and they won't go alone. But, my God—if I were young again—if I had ten more years—ten years of my old self—I'd drive them straight—Ursula."

She had scarcely listened, but now something unusual in the quality of his voice made her turn to him in wonder. She had never thought of him before as capable of suffering.

"Everyone says how wonderful you are, grandfather."

"Maybe—maybe—I can put the fear of God into a few yet. But it's an effort now—in a year or two they'll put the fear of God into me. It's here—here." He tapped his forehead with one twisted finger. "Softening, child—softening. One doesn't live eighty years as I have done with impunity—the machinery wears out at last. I don't fear death. But I'm afraid of myself—of being beaten. One can beat even a dead man."

"What is it, grandfather? Is anything wrong?"

He was silent for a moment, gathering himself together. When he spoke again the gust of trembling had passed. He sat back, the tips of his fingers pressed lightly on one another as though to emphasize their steadiness.

"The Valley is giving trouble. That's all. They want to turn me out. They've had enough of me. I made them prosperous and men never forgive that." He turned his head towards her, his pointed chin lifted. "Do you

know what the Valley was like sixty years ago? I have an old picture of it, up at Ivonrood, I'll show you one day. A swamp—a forest—a few meadows—a straggling village. That was my inheritance. The first Seton won it on the battlefield, for running away at the right moment, so it's said, and every descendant has held it since in dire poverty. Until I came. I made it. I found the coal. I sank the shafts. I built the works. Steel and copper—the finest in the world—were made in them. The wretched population quadrupled itself in twenty years. The God-forsaken village became the biggest industrial centre in the control of one man. And the Setons grew from miserable, struggling nobility to be the richest family in England. But there was more to it than that. I brought wealth to this country. I won the biggest contracts for her in the world's markets. I beat down foreign competition. And in the last four years I've won battles—up there against strikers and traitors and fools—and out in Flanders and on the sea—wherever the finest steel was needed. They scowl at me when I walk through High Lane—they rant about me at their scurvy little meetings. I am the capitalist who grinds the faces of the noble poor—I am the blood-sucker and the parasite—but I tell you I'm damned proud—damned proud."

He had made her listen. She had caught fire from him. She saw him suddenly as a lonely, heroic figure who had shielded the backs of the younger men from treachery. She laid her hand on his, feeling him now as close to her own grief.

"And we're proud too, grandfather."

"I've kept them at heel so long as the war lasted," he went on, beating the arm of his chair with a clenched fist, "but now the truce is over. They mean to be rid

of me and of men like me who have made and dreamed things beyond their understanding. They mean to destroy what we have lived for and died for from the beginning of English history. Everything must be torn down to their level because they are incapable of rising to ours. Very well. It's a fight. With a miserable frightened Government to hold the ring. And I am an old man nearing his dotage."

"Grandfather—we're there—Father and Hubert are there—they'll carry on."

He looked at her curiously.

"War is a healthy thing when it doesn't last too long," he meditated. "But when the river runs low the mud comes to the surface. There are no men left, it seems to me. Only the women are men now. I'm no lover of women. I hated your damned suffrage—but I'm not a fool. I take the best tools wherever they come from." He smiled, a one-sided little smile that lent his wizened face a kind of puckish charm. "Do you know, you are a real Seton, my dear? You're like my father who was a Seton at the zenith. You've got his colouring—the red-brown hair and the straight black eyebrows and the grey eyes. That's his short nose too—and his mouth—and I don't doubt you've got his temper. You're not like your father who is just a type—or like your mother who is a shadow. You're not like Margaret or me—who have both got a touch of death in us."

"And Hubert——?"

He patted her hand gently.

"And so you've married, Ursula?"

She withdrew her hand and stood up quickly and silently like someone with great self-control who has been hurt almost beyond endurance.

"So you know that already?" she said at last.

He made an expressive gesture.

"I told you I dined with your father. We were *en famille*—I fancy that lackadaisical dog Esmé Monteith had learnt rather to reckon himself in the circle—and you know your father prefers to share his burdens. I saw that there was something wrong and I got it out of him. You've upset them very much, Ursula."

"I know," she said. "I don't care. I was sorry at first, but now their trouble seems to me petty and ridiculous."

"The other generation's troubles always are. You should humour us a little."

It seemed to the old man who watched her that she thrust him aside—rode over him as though he had not been.

"Adam Brodie and I loved each other," she said. "We wanted each other so that the world might have gone to ruin about our ears and we should not have known or cared. There was no choice about it. We did what we did partly because we forgot you—partly because we didn't want you. We had five days to live in—it was little enough for a whole life time."

"A grocer's son, eh?"

"How can you think of that?" she asked back with a low fierceness. "Don't you see how mean—how stupid it is? And to me it's as though you talked a dead language. Grocer's sons—butcher's sons—those are your distinctions—you people who have stayed at home and been comfortable—and—and safe. And you don't matter to us." She touched her breast with her finger. "Out there we had our own distinctions. There were men and women and there were cads and cowards. And my husband was a man."

He bowed his head.

"You are a trifle arrogant, my dear," he murmured. "I won't insult you I hope by reminding you that you are also a trifle young—young at any rate to have effected quite such a sweeping revolution."

But the pride and anger had broken in her. She leant against the mantelshelf with her face hidden in her arm.

"I don't feel arrogant, grandfather, but I do feel terribly, terribly young. Such a long way to live perhaps—and nothing worth while—everything gone already."

They remained silent together, he watching her with a wry smile, that was half pitying, half curious, wholly without mirth. Then very slowly and painfully he lifted himself up out of the deep chair and stood beside her.

"No," he said, "no—not everything. There's Ivonrood and Black Valley. They are mine to pass on to anyone whom I think fit to hold them." She lifted her head, stirred by some premonition and he assented gravely. "Yes—it's Hubert—as head of the family I heard through a special channel last night. It happened three days ago—probably the last man out. You are my heir, now, Ursula—that's what I came to tell you."

3

The Setons returned home shortly after midnight. They had drunk champagne and they had witnessed strange and deeply moving sights—the spectacle of a great people relieved suddenly from a great burden. Mrs. Seton was still talking of it all as she came into the hall. She was full of a joyous exaltation.

"Fancy English people—dancing—in Piccadilly. It was like a wonderful Arabian Nights Tale. But I liked it best when the people climbed onto our carriage and

talked to us—just as though they had known us all their lives. They were so sweet and friendly and happy. It made me think of the time when we shall wake up from our evil dreams and find nothing but love and goodness.”

Margaret looked up into Esmé Monteith's face with a grimace that made him wonder whether she was going to cry or burst out laughing. He touched her arm reassuringly but she slipped away from him up the stairs to her own room, and after a moment's hesitation he followed the Setons into the library. He had not wanted to come in. Even now he did not go beyond the shadow of the doorway. He stood there expressionless and silent and watchful.

Lord Ivonrood and his grand-daughter had been sitting close together before the fire. They had talked together for the first time in their lives, and on the opening of the door the old man had laid his hand on the girl's as though to confirm some pledge. Now as her mother entered, Ursula arose and faced her. And Mrs. Seton who knew all that that silence and gravity concealed came to her and took her in her arms and kissed her.

“My own dear girl—you're not to look at us like that—not tonight of all nights. We're not enemies—we're people who love you—who want to understand. We've been talking it over—all of us together—and we—your father and mother—feel that we were hasty in our judgment. There were reasons for what you did that we old-stay-at-homes have to have explained to us—but we feel that any man you loved must have been worthy of you. Isn't that so, Roy? Isn't that so, father?”

Ivonrood did not answer. Mr. Seton nodded solemnly. The unaccustomed wine and food and emotion had

shaken him more than he knew. He had the air of a very slightly intoxicated gentleman making an honourable apology.

"Major Brodie must have been a brave man," he said, "and I know brave men."

"Ursula—we—we should have welcomed him as our son."

"But fortunately he is dead," Ivonrood muttered maliciously to himself.

"It was narrow-hearted and wrong of us. We forgot that we are all equal—that everything is good and for the best—even you must feel that, Ursula, some day——"

She was smiling tremulously, turning from one to the other, with the high inspired confidence of her faith, until slowly it came to her that there was something here that she did not understand—that Ivonrood looked away from her—that Ursula's expression had not changed. It was as though everything she had said had had some second and deeper meaning that she did not know of. "I want us all to be happy tonight," she struggled on, "reconciled—at peace." And then suddenly her voice grew sharp and hard. "Has anything happened—is anything wrong?"

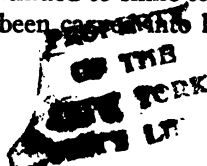
Ursula turned quickly towards her grandfather. She wanted to say "Not now—leave her tonight," but already the scrap of yellow paper was in his hand. He was old and very tired and death seemed of little moment.

"It's bad news, Ann——"

Mr. Seton had seen the telegram. He swayed, fumbling at the table—leaning on it.

"Good God—not Hubert?"

But Mrs. Seton continued to smile terribly. It was as though the smile had been carved into her face.



CHAPTER IV

1

ON DECEMBER the twentieth the goat died and for a week afterwards they had meat. Then Brodie made a calculation. There was nothing more to be got out of the vegetable patch. Except for an occasional rabbit trapped in the wood behind the cottage the dwindling heap of potatoes was their only source of life. And there were three of them to live.

Brodie thought it out one night. It was bitter cold, and in spite of all his efforts the damp soaked through the dilapidated ceiling on their straw bed, so that from sheer misery it was difficult to sleep. Powys and he lay huddled together for warmth. And at last Powys had fallen asleep, like a confiding child, with one long arm thrown over his companion's body.

Sooner or later one of them would have to go to the wall.

There was the old woman who would die soon in any case. She was an enemy. And she belonged to a race that had never sentimentalised over weakness. There was Powys. To all intents and purposes a complete stranger. Besides he had lost his wits and might never find them again. Perhaps not much of a fellow in any case. Then there was Adam Brodie and the overwhelming will in him to live.

In the end he could not bear Powys' proximity any longer but got up and went and sat down in a far corner

of the loft with his head between his clenched fists and his teeth set, thinking it out.

By the time the old woman had begun to stir he saw what it all meant for him.

Powys' body grew strong again. But his mind remained that of a lost and unhappy child. He had forgotten everything that had happened and he forgot from hour to hour what was said to him. He did incalculable things. So that escape with him remained impossible. Sometimes he lay for hours together on his straw bed with his face to the wall, refusing food, hunching his shoulders sullenly against Brodie's threats and pleadings. On better days he consented to play draughts on an improvised board with clay men that Brodie had made for him, and played eagerly until some wandering recollection seized him and he dashed the game aside to resume his broodings.

To him Brodie was a stranger, sometimes a person to be turned to for comfort, sometimes so hopelessly inadequate as to become an enemy.

Three times, driven by an all-powerful homing instinct, Powys ran away. The third time he covered two miles before Brodie caught him. On that occasion Brodie who was the smaller man by a head, and weak with starvation, shook him till he cried. And the spectacle of the big dark man crying quite simply and openly moved Brodie to such remorse that he took him home and told him stories which of all things was what pleased Powys most.

They were always the same stories—of a little shop-keeper's son who won his way to fame and fortune and married the most perfect woman in the world, of his struggles and fears and great temptations, of a first glimpse of the white English cliffs—of a glorious home-

coming. They were told somewhat after the manner of the home journals which Mrs. Brodie favoured and somewhat after the manner of the Dick Turpin adventures which young Brodie infinitely preferred. And there were rare vivid touches that were Brodie's own.

In any case Powys never tired of the stories, because he never remembered them. Which was fortunate, since they were the only ones Brodie knew.

After the poacher no one came to the cottage. Sometimes Brodie had a troubling fancy that the old woman did not want anyone to come—that instead of betraying them she now wanted to conceal them. Once when a group of men had shown up on the horizon she had even given warning.

That night Brodie heard her laughing to herself again.

It was soon after that that Powys came to him in a state of strange excitement and drew him out to the front of the cottage as though to show him some wonderful discovery. An old apple tree had begun to blossom.

So that the spring had come.

2

Brodie was counting the potatoes when it happened. There had been a time when the potatoes had been so many separate devils tempting him along a dozen ways to safety. They had conjured up the old food visions which had plagued him during the first week of the escape. They had showed him corners of his father's shop where the biscuits were kept and the high columns of tinned meats. There was one of them with a distinct and loathsome face which grimaced at him, making fun of him because the frontier was after all only twenty miles away.

Now they were nothing at all to him. They were

merely dusty nauseating objects which from some cause or other refused to be counted. Brodie tried again and again with his habitual obstinacy. "One-two-three——" But it was always the same. At that point they always balked him. It was like trying to make an unwilling horse jump a high fence. So far and no further. "One-two-three——" Then a slackening of impulse—a jibbing and wavering and a full stop.

The truth came upon him in a flash that for an instant illuminated the whole situation and then left it in a completer darkness.

"Why—I'm going potty too—I'm off my chump." But failing to hold the realization he began to count again—"One-two-three——"

Then the old woman in the room beneath screamed. It was a peculiar scream. It brought Brodie to his feet as though he had been galvanized. He heard her pattering wildly across the floor and then a frantic scrabbling sound like that of a pursued animal. And yet when her terrible old face thrust itself out of the trap door he could have sworn she grinned at him.

"Die Soldaten—die Soldaten kommen." She pointed downwards with a pointed finger. "Die Soldaten."

But Brodie knew already. He could not count potatoes but his instinct reached out swiftly to meet an event which he had foreseen from the beginning. It was over. But he had always known what he would do so that there was nothing to think or trouble about. He ran to Powys, drowsing in his corner, and shook him.

"They've got us," he said rapidly. "They'll shoot us out of hand. If we can do in one it will be better than nothing."

But the Powys who had forgotten was in a sulky mood and hid his face deeper in his arms.

Brodie heard voices and the clatter of hoofs on the cobbled yard. There was no time to waste trying to rouse the poor bemused brain to action. He had to act for himself, for everything they both stood for. He swung himself out of the loft, jolting against the old woman as he did so, who for once did not cower away from him. She held a wood-chopper in her hand, and she offered it to him, shaking her palsied head.

"Todtschlagen," she whispered. "Todtschlagen."

Brodie nodded.

"That's all right."

He forgot that she was an enemy, and that he had threatened to kill her. He snatched the wretched weapon from her and ran out swinging it like a battle axe. He was fairly certain that a bullet would stop him in the first minute. But he knew—and it was like a religious faith—that somehow or other Ursula would know that he had made a fight for it.

3

The lieutenant covered the amazing apparition with his revolver. Had it been a few yards nearer he would not have hesitated to shoot, but a man with a wood chopper who flings himself single-handed on armed soldiers is more likely to be mad than dangerous, and the lieutenant was a cool-headed veteran, not to be flustered into provocation.

"Hands up!" he commanded briefly. "Hands up—and drop it!"

He saw his would-be assailant stop dead as though he had, in fact, been shot through the heart. The look of savage resolution on the gaunt wild-looking face faded into an open-mouthed stupefaction. He paid no attention to the order, so that it was not fear that stopped him,

but stood there gaping with his arms limp at his sides, and the impromptu battle-axe at his feet. The lieutenant perceived immediately behind him a little old woman who stood and watched them as though they had been the actors in some grimly humorous drama.

"My God! Why—why you're English!"

It was the lieutenant's turn to stare. The troopers behind him involuntarily moved their horses forward.

"Of course I'm English. What the deuce did you take me for?"

"There's been an advance then?"

"Advance be hanged! What are you talking about? I'm patrolling these parts and thought I'd better have a look in here. Anyhow who and what are you?"

Brodie came nearer and put his hand timidly on the lieutenant's bridle as though he doubted its existence. He had an idea that he was dead—or completely "potty." He felt suddenly very sleepy and it occurred to him that he could not remember when he had slept last.

"I'm sorry—I don't sort of understand. You see, I was prisoner for nine months, and I've been in hiding here for God knows how long. I don't know what's happened—there's been a big scrap, eh?"

The lieutenant did not answer directly.

"If you got this far you might have chanced the last twenty miles. Or didn't you know?"

"Yes, I knew. But I've got a Tommy with me. He escaped at the same time. He's queer in the head. I couldn't leave him."

"A Tommy, eh? And what may you be?"

"Brodie—Major Adam Brodie of the Enshires."

The troopers winked at one another. The lieutenant continued to stare solemnly. Finally, coming to a decision, he saluted.

"Sorry, sir. There's not much of your uniform left. By Gad—when you came out like that I nearly shot you for a mad Hun. What did you take us for?"

"More Huns."

"Didn't you know?" he nodded towards the figure standing impassively on the doorstep. "Didn't she tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"Why we're in occupation here—the war was over months ago." But Brodie was silent, patting the horse's neck with an idle trembling hand, and something in the bowed, scare-crow figure touched the lieutenant to a vivid understanding. "By Gad sir, you've had a thin time of it."

Brodie turned as though a sudden thought had struck him. He saw the old woman, and that she was laughing—openly now with a soundless, terrible enjoyment that threatened to shake the decayed old body to pieces. And suddenly Brodie began to laugh too—laughed till he had to lean against the lieutenant's horse for support—till he forgot why he was laughing and his knees gave way under him, pitching him into a dark, exquisite sleep.

CHAPTER V

1

IVONROOD stopped the carriage at the end of High Lane, where two stark upstanding cliffs of granite guarded the Valley. Here the road ran parallel to the railway embankment, squeezed up against it as though jostling for a place in the narrow outlet to the world. To the left a steep and sandy path led upwards to the rim of the great natural cup, winding behind a squat unlovely chapel and through a disused churchyard where the dead under their drunken headstones seemed to be striving, with outspread skeleton hands, to hold themselves against the final inevitable landslip.

Ivonrood began the ascent in silence. He wore his usual town dress—the black cape over the old-fashioned frock-coat, the strapped trousers, the curly-brimmed top-hat—and his eccentricity seemed to his companion an unconscious, not unadmirable arrogance. He made no concessions to time or place. If there was discord between himself and his surroundings it was because the latter failed to adjust itself to his fixed and infallible judgment.

There were houses dotted over the mountain side—for the most part two-roomed hovels huddled together in cringing groups wherever the ground gave them foothold. Squalid barefooted children playing listlessly in the mud before the gaping doorways ran in as Ivonrood and his granddaughter passed.

And always, it seemed to Ursula, they left behind them a deeper and sullen silence.

But Ivonrood went on indifferently. His frail body was inspired with a purpose that allowed no respite. When he stopped it was to point out some feature that had become visible.

"There—on the right—that's Ivon Head—the first shaft sunk—closed now. On that slag hill the sulphuric acid vats. There are pipes carrying the acid down to the tin-plate works. And those chimneys in double file—forty there are altogether—that's steel. At night when they tap the furnaces they can see the glare right out to sea."

"The chimneys are like great guns," Ursula thought.

They came at last to the rock that jutted out like a ship's crow's-nest from the flat curve of the hill. Behind them, on the plateau, were broken walls and traces of a dead forgotten garden. Even the weeds were dead. But discoloured shells still marked out the old flower-beds and on the rock itself there was a rustic bench that looked out over the valley and a broken wooden railing. Perhaps children had once played here, and the railing had been for them. If so it was all many years since. Now in the broad afternoon light an unquiet atmosphere hung about the ruined place. The gentle sadness of all deserted things had been made bitter by some unexercised and tragic spirit. So that the shadow moving out furtively from under a crumbled wall startled Ursula only as a creation of her own troubled fancy.

But Ivonrood had seen it too. He called out in a high mocking falsetto:

"Hie, Hughie, hie—come here, you skulking old dog!"

There was no answer. The figure had vanished as

swiftly as it had come and the rattle of loose stones on the hillside told of an unghostly and headlong flight. But for a moment Ursula had seen a face—older even than her grandfather's—and terrible. It had looked straight at Ivonrood and then at herself—comparing, registering with a demented intensity that left her now with the dull sense that follows a deep wound. But Ivonrood had already turned away.

"In my boyhood this was the Hunting Lodge," he explained. "That man's father lived here as gamekeeper and his father's father. It was hereditary. When the coal was started Hughie went down into the pits to get more money, like the rest of them—and was injured. He bears me some sort of grudge. He's mad of course. As mad as I shall be in another year or two." He dismissed the subject impatiently and motioned Ursula to stand beside him. "Now look, my dear, look! It's changed, eh?"

She thought of the old engraving he had shown her. It was a quaint work of art—the creation of one Edward Jones, who, according to a gracefully lettered dedication, had been the humble servant of Sir Thomas Seton, Lord of Ivonrood. It had wrung a rare laugh from Ursula. For in the picture the mountains were covered with battalions of unknown trees, one like another, stiff and solemn as soldiers on parade. The river that ran through the valley seemed to be lying on its side, threatening to spill out the comic-eyed fish that disported themselves in its pellucid depths. The fish were as big as the deer in the park, and the deer were as big as the trees, but the huntsman who pursued them on horseback dwarfed everything, even Ivonrood standing majestically at the end of a splendid avenue. Perhaps the huntsman was no other than Sir Thomas Seton himself, for a good pat-

ron must be assured that he is greater than his possessions.

"Changed! Changed!" Ivonrood repeated with a kind of subdued ecstasy.

Ursula had laughed at Edward Jones, but now she saw how pathetic he was. He had been a fourth rate artist, yet because in his zealous obsequious soul he had truly loved the things that he had seen, his picture had conveyed a genuine emotion. Black Valley had been real to him. It seemed stable and eternal as God and the Seton family. Long after Edward Jones became dust there would be green pasture-land by the river and deer browsing beneath the trees and a Seton at Ivonrood. That had been Edward Jones' faith.

Now Ursula stood close to the broken railing and looked for the landmarks that he had tried so gallantly to immortalize. And they were gone. The soft green hills had become arid mountains hunched up like the shoulders of a giant—muscle-seamed and strung with barbaric chains of twisting streets. In the valley was marsh-land and stretches of black stagnant water, broken by high ridges and frowning cliffs of slag and refuse—so long established that on them were piled factories, belching chimney stacks, vast buildings already forsaken and tumbling into mediaeval decay.

And amidst the wild volcanic eruption the river dragged its poisoned waters towards the western gap beyond which lay the sea.

The pasture lands were gone. Where Edward Jones' Noah's Ark trees had been were now houses—rank upon rank, tier upon tier, marshalled by their square faced loveless chapels. From the distance they looked as stiff and disciplined as the trees had done. But on the hillside Ursula had seen how their order broke up into a rout of

squalor and despair. She had seen the old graves sprouting up in their midst like evil weeds—as though only death could live in such a soil.

There was death too in the silence. The sounds that belonged to their isolation—the hum of insects, the chatter of a bird, the rustle of grass were mute. The smoke laden air that hung in a muffling cloud over the valley carried nothing but the clank of couplings and the snort and whistle of a train as it crawled its way over the bridge which linked one slag heap with another.

Death and machinery.

Ivonrood pointed with his stick. His shrunk puckish face was lit up white from within. He seemed to have become transparent—etherealised, as though all but the very essence of him had been burnt away.

"That's what I wanted you to see!"

"It's like a town under bombardment," Ursula said. "One can see the scars on the ground and the ruined houses, and the smoke rising."

"The first works became too small," he went on, indicating where the confusion of tumbled and deserted cottages lay thickest. "There is no time to mend or adjust. Things that are outgrown are scrapped. Yes—yes, Ursula, a town under bombardment. Look my dear—there's Ivonrood—you can just see it standing above the old pit-head—the fort where we are holding out. Men like your precious Monteith think there's only one way to fight. He'll go out one of these fine days and get himself killed in some stupid frontier scrap and think he's died for his country in the only way an English gentleman can. It will make no difference. The only war that matters is here—down there." His excitement died down. He made a gesture of aloof imperturbable dignity. "Nothing spectacular—no bloodshed possibly—certainly

no decorations—merely insult and calumny. Still—a fight to maintain what we died to maintain.”

She followed his steady gaze in silence. It was strange how this rather grotesque little old man could stir her. Perhaps because he had fought and was dying—terribly dying—he had the power to make her see things as he saw them. Even himself. Even his own age and littleness and grotesqueness he could transform. He appeared to her now as he felt himself to be—something dynamic—an energy that had disemboweled the earth—that had changed green hills into the blackened walls of a crater in which the titanic forces that he had invoked still smoked and rumbled ceaselessly. Under his spell the sullen-faced people, the dirt and squalor of their homes, faded into a vaster prospect. She divined dimly that there was more than hideousness and wealth and power in what he had attained. There was grandeur here—something sublime. The convulsion that hurled Edward Jones’ world to ruin was also remaking, recasting, pushing painfully upward through its own chaos to an unknown but higher purpose.

And Ursula who had forsworn tears, felt herself grow blind. She had seen men march out to be destroyed and to remake. It was like that. It hurt her as they had hurt her—it gave her the same joy.

But Ivonrood had relaxed. He sat down stiffly on the rickety bench and watched his granddaughter with his habitual expression of cold intentness. She looked very vivid standing there against the grim waste—too vivid, perhaps, like a slender fast-burning flame—and vaguely pathetic because of her youth and air of knowledge and grave self-mastery. She had been a tempestuous, headstrong child, Ivonrood remembered. She had laughed and cried more often than any of his own chil-

dren, and her will had been untamable. It disturbed him that she should have tamed herself.

"You don't look well, Ursula," he muttered querulously. "Too thin—burnt out. You don't take care of yourself. One of these days we shall have you ill."

"I'm not going to die, if that's what you mean, grandfather. Not if I can help it. That would be a poor sort of way out. Besides it doesn't take me that way. But I want something to do—to carry on. Can't you give it me, grandfather?"

He looked away from her, blinking his white-lashed sunken eyes. Perhaps it was the fading light that made him seem smaller and dimmer. He did not answer for a moment, and when he did, it was as though he had only partly understood.

"You will be a Seton, Ursula. I've arranged for that. Whoever you marry—a Seton. And your children—Setons. Your son will have my title. Margaret won't have children—please God—but your son——" He did not see the contracting of her straight black brows. He went on drowsily to himself. "We must find someone who is worthy—Monteith, eh? I don't know. A difficult fellow. Old fashioned. The conventional soldier. But a man of breeding—of brains and spirit—who would stand by you."

She sat down beside him and laid her hand on his.

"I'm Ursula Brodie, grandfather. Adam's wife. Just because he's dead—being his wife is all I've left."

He chuckled to himself—a distant tinkling laugh—and his head swayed gently on his shoulders as though it had become too heavy for him.

"Not that it matters—what we say. If he wants to—he'll marry you—sooner or later."

She shrunk away from him. His spell over her was

broken. He did not seem any more titanic or admirable. Instead he filled her with a vague repulsion. He was a hard, ambitious man, creeping into his dotage, whose last hold was on the things that he had idolised. The rest had slipped from him. He could never understand.

What was his Valley compared to the green glades of Fontainebleau, or his whole life compared to those five days of living?

And then in the sheer agony of remembrance she turned to him again. But he had fallen asleep. His head rested on the back of the bench, and his face that was half turned to her had an intolerable look of childhood.

She saw that he was not wonderful or hard or repulsive. He was just a tired old man.

She took his cold impassive hand back into hers and waited patiently.

2

And three weeks later Adam Brodie went home.

A cynical doctor who had seen him through a short but violent fever, and to whose wry sense of humour the whole incident seemed to make a peculiar appeal, accompanied him to the Calais boat. He liked this stubborn, romantic-tempered Cockney. He liked him too much for his amusement to be free from a cross uneasy pity.

"Well, you're a brave man anyhow," he reflected as they reached the gangway. "I don't refer to your adventure with the Hun lady. It's this going back without warning. It's damn brave of you. I wouldn't risk it for a thousand pounds. Besides I'd feel bound to give my people time to get their expressions fixed into a decent state of rejoicing. It's rude—this melodramatic business

—like bursting into a person's bedroom without knocking. It's not done."

But Brodie looked hungrily across at the crowded bustling deck. The boat did not go for another half hour, but if he could get on to the bow and face westwards—if he could only take his feet off this foreign soil it would be more bearable. He would be nearer.

"That's all right," he said. "My wife knows."

The doctor considered him sardonically.

"We didn't know you had a wife," he retorted. "It makes it all the pluckier of you. Or perhaps it's the damn good opinion you have of yourself."

Brodie smiled as though he had not heard and, to pay him out, the doctor kept him lingering on the quay till the bell rang. At the last moment Brodie thought of Powys.

"I'd be jolly glad if you'd let me know how he gets on," he said. "I'll want to look him up when he comes over. And my—my people—they'll want to meet him too."

"He won't remember you, or that you saved his life," the doctor answered, "and if he does, he won't thank you. You won't be able to play the hero before her that way, Major."

He took a malicious delight in the dark flood of colour that spread over his late patient's face, and in the muffled protest.

"It's not that. But it'll be someone to talk old times over with."

"He won't remember anything, probably."

"He'll remember the war," Brodie said. "There are things people don't forget."

"Are there? I'd like to know 'em. The war? In three years time the main difference between Powys and

the rest of us will be that he's forgotten because he's mad, and we've forgotten because we're sane. Well, never mind. You're too young to believe the truth. Give me your address—I'll write."

Brodie's hand went to his breast pocket and lingered there. A half smiling, half apologetic, perplexity relieved his look of hard-set patience. It was as though, for a moment, he faltered before a new aspect of things.

"That's stupid, isn't it? I don't seem to have an address. You see, I'm not going back to my people—not at first. I'm going to my wife—and I don't know—I don't sort of seem to live anywhere."

"Twixt the devil and the deep sea, eh? Don't choose the deep sea, Major—unless you're a strong swimmer. The devil's a good fellow. And I'll find you somewhere."

The bell rang again, and with an exclamation of relief, Brodie turned and ran across the gangway. But half way over he stumbled weakly and the M. P. at the far end had to catch hold of him. The doctor wished then that he had shaken hands. He had a sudden fit of unfamiliar self-reproach. There was no sense in ragging a sick man—one, too, who had come back to life after everyone, no doubt, had buried and forgotten him. There would be ragging enough.

But Adam Brodie never heard the doctor's remorseful "Good luck," shouted across the widening strip of water. He never once looked back. He pushed his way steadily through the khaki crowd to the nose of the boat, swinging slowly, like a magnetic needle, England-wards.

3

A thick fog hung over the channel. Behind it a ghostly radiance passed backwards and forwards as though someone were seeking the ship with a lantern.

It came quite close and then went off again, leaving a white muffling twilight.

The ship, feeling each foot of her way, sent out deep melancholy calls which came back to her at intervals, from a long way off, and close at hand. At each answer she seemed to tremble like some frightened living thing.

It was cold too. The moisture dripped from the ship's gear and from the faces of the passengers who waited disconsolately for the first sign of escape. But gradually the decks emptied. The forty minutes crossing might develop into four hours. It was better to make the best of things.

Only Brodie remained, leaning against the taffrail and gazing out onto the ship's course. He was a lonely conspicuous figure and an artillery captain passing him on his way below decks stopped a moment.

"Rotten, isn't it? Hadn't you better come down, sir? It's warm there at any rate and we're fixing up a game of poker. If you'd care to join us."

Brodie turned eagerly.

"Thanks. I'd like to, but I don't sort of want to miss anything."

"Miss what? A collision?"

Brodie laughed.

"England."

"Oh, Lord, she's not going to be missed. We'll bump into her sooner or later. Too late for me. I'd got a dinner fixed for seven. It's a wash-out and just my beastly luck."

"I haven't seen her for two years," Brodie said.

"Out there all that time?"

"Yes—I was taken prisoner."

He let his great coat fall open a little, showing his

Mons ribbon. The artillery captain selected a cigarette and tapped it on his gold case reflectively. Queer how you could spot these ranker officers every time.

"Rotten luck. There aren't many though who've been all the way and come through. Must have seen a lot of the fun."

"Oh, yes—rather."

But the impulse to talk was gone. He had been hysterically thankful to break the tension of his vigil. He could have poured out his whole heart. He had been so much alone and now this last waiting was almost more than he could bear. But his companion silenced him. He did not know why.

"Well I've only been out since the armistice. Beastly boring. All the kicks and none of the kudos. I'm fed up with it. Anyone can have old England who wants it. I'd clear out if I could——"

Brodie did not answer. He fastened up his great coat again. The confused motive that had been at work in him had been only in part a desire to display his quality. He had shown a Masonic sign. But it had not been recognised. This man was not a brother.

The artillery captain stared into the fog, vaguely embarrassed.

"Oh well, so long, sir!" he said finally.

He thought over his whole life. He took every little thing that had happened to him and looked at it. Even the ridiculous things had a kind of halo about them.

He had gone out a little grocer's son and he came back an officer and a gentleman. He had dreamed of performing brave deeds and for four years he knew, judging himself sternly and impartially by the highest standards of romantic fiction, that he had been brave.

And every romance ever written was a poor pale thing compared to his love——

He had come through. He had made good. He felt dizzy and weak with the mightiness of his happiness.

All at once the ship rode through the last barrier of fog into the evening sunshine. And there were the high white cliffs of Dover——

Adam Brodie hid his face as though the light blinded him.

4

He was afraid.

As the boat train slowed down, gliding with the grave dignity of accomplishment through a ravine of spectral houses, he clasped his hands over his knees to steady himself. Odd, ridiculous fragments of the prayers that Mrs. Brodie had taught him ran through his thoughts——“Lord God help me—please God, make me good.” In other ways of his own he was praying all the time. He was afraid of being too little. One had to be big to embrace big things. He had learnt how to rise equal to death which was supposed to be the supreme test of a man’s soul. But he did not know if he could meet this happiness. He did not know whether he could really grasp it, really feel it to its uttermost. It might be beyond him after all.

“Please God make me big enough!” Adam Brodie prayed.

He tried to imagine how she would look and the first things that they would say to one another, but his thoughts became panic-stricken and ran away from him. He was almost glad when the train stopped for a moment. It gave him time. He looked out of the window. They were passing over a viaduct now and beneath them

were roofs of the houses—mile upon mile, mile upon mile, and odd happy-go-lucky streets. There were gaudy cinemas and public houses and little black figures coming and going. The lights were beginning to spring up everywhere. They had haloes round them because it was raining and the rain made a blur on the carriage window.

Of course it was raining.

Good old London—dear old London——

He did not see her at first. The station was badly lit still and there were so many people who jostled against him and against each other in a fretful and vain effort to get someone to come to their assistance. Even in that moment they troubled Brodie a little. He did not know what he had expected of them. He had thought they would be different.

Then he began to look for her. At first it was a methodless search—exquisite in its possibilities. Any moment they might come face to face. Or he might feel a sudden hand on his arm——. He knew now that they would say nothing at all. They would just hold one another—make sure of one another. Something of the fear which they had endured would make that assurance the first and only expression of their happiness.

Then he went down to the end of the platform and walked slowly back. There were a number of women who had come to meet their men folk home on leave but they too seemed absorbed and irritated by the difficulties of departure. By the time he retraced his steps again the crowd had begun to thin. It was almost possible to count the people. He began to walk faster, urged by the sudden need to cut short the tension.

"No—there's no other boat train." The ticket collector answered without looking at him.

But in spite of that he began to search the other platforms. He asked the same question over and over again in a dry, broken voice that he could hardly control. He hardly waited to hear what was said to him. He ran back to the original platform. She might have been delayed. She might be waiting there even now.

"Ursula! Ursula!" he said aloud, pleading with her.

It was half an hour before he understood that she had not come. By that time he was trembling so that he could hardly stand——

5

"I'm afraid your people haven't turned up."

"It looks like it," Brodie admitted. He spoke in a facetious, careless tone for the same reason that he had dragged himself to a seat in a dark corner of the station. He wanted to hide. He wanted to keep away from the light and from people until he had got back his nerve and could look at things sanely. If he could reassure this stranger he might leave him alone. "I expect they never got my letter," he added. "It's these rotten posts——"

"Things like that happen," the other agreed, "but it's hard all the same. Especially if one's been away a long time and has been looking forward—I'm sorry."

"It's all right," Brodie muttered. But his voice shook and he sprang up abruptly as though to escape from his own weakness. "I've been ill—that's all. I'd better be getting along——"

"Home?"

"No," he answered shortly. It struck him momentarily as curious that he had never thought of going home. Of course it would be too much of a shock to them—a cruel thing to do. But there was more than that in

his reluctance. He half realised that he was holding the little house in Peckham away from him—postponing the very thought of it.

"May I ask—have you anywhere to go?"

"Nowhere particular."

"You will find it difficult to get into a hotel. London is very crowded. I have known of men who have tramped the streets all night. Would—would you come home with me?"

For the first time Brodie looked at the intruder. He saw a long thin figure, badly put together and poorly dressed. From under a shabby Homburg an elderly spectacled face peered into his with a gentle earnestness that checked the first impatient impulse to refuse. The man was a gentleman. There were quite a number of gentlefolk in Peckham—shabby gentlefolk—and Adam Brodie knew their inimitable accent.

"It's no end decent of you," he stammered, "I can't do that though—I'll find something. I'm used to roughing it——"

"I know—of course. But you're tired—and, as you said, ill——"

"Oh, it's not as bad as all that. I'm better now——"

"You see, I come here every night," the man went on eagerly. "I am always hoping to find someone like yourself whom I can help. I look forward to it. And when I do find someone it makes me very happy. It comforts me a great deal. I explain that so that you need not feel under any obligation. I—I ask it as a sort of favour——"

Brodie was silent. To his own astonishment he knew he was going to accept. He was weak and shaken but also there was something about this stranger that made refusal seem churlish and almost cruel. The long

thin hands were tightly clasped together and their attitude was full of effort and painful anticipation. It had cost him something to speak. Brodie, raw to the nerves, felt the other's shrinking with a kind of relief.

"Not that I have much to offer. Just a night's shelter under a friendly roof. You will not be troubled by a stranger's inquisitiveness, and to-morrow—why, to-morrow you go your way to your friends and leave me in your debt. That's all."

"Thank you," Brodie said. "And I'll be glad to come. My name's Brodie—Adam Brodie——"

The man's face lit up with relief and an unexpected charm.

"And mine is Alec Quinn," he said, holding out his hand.

They came almost in silence to a forgotten Bloomsbury square and climbed the long dark flight of stairs of an old forgotten house which had once known great days, to Alec Quinn's home.

It was the strangest place that Brodie had ever seen. He knew how the rich lived because he had read about them. Their rooms were crowded with crystal candelabras, and brocaded furniture, and huge paintings in thick gold frames. He had seen the homes of the very poor and there was the little house in Peckham, hanging precariously between two worlds. But this fitted in with nothing in his experience. It was a white-washed garret, divided into two by a serge curtain, and almost empty except for a few pictures on the walls and a deep dado of books. So that Alec Quinn was, as he looked, poor. And yet an inexplicable atmosphere of well-being warmed the place. It was as though each picture and each book breathed out a rich luxuriousness of its own.

Not that Brodie knew this or would have understood it. The pictures to him were queer and ugly. There were quaint, old-fashionedly dressed people grouped about a Crucifix in a way that would have shocked Mrs. Brodie very much, and half-naked ladies with impossible figures dancing in impossible gardens, who would have shocked her still more, and virgins with bulging foreheads holding out grotesquely stout babies. They told no story and Brodie liked pictures to tell stories. He thought them hideous and rather indecent. But they did not care what he thought. It was the same with the books. The names on the shabby bindings were unfamiliar. There was not a single old favourite among them. But they made no apology for themselves. They had an air of proud self-sufficiency and quiet indifference.

And in some strange way they added to Brodie's trouble. They deepened his sense of doubt and insecurity. They were things that he did not understand.

He sat down in the one arm-chair before the fire and hid his face in his hands. It had been a long walk and he had not realised until now in the full tide of reaction how weak he was. He had a childish longing to cry—to cry his heart out without restraint or shame. As though he knew, Alec Quinn came close to him, hesitatingly, like a shy yet persistent animal, and touched him gently on the shoulder.

"It will be all right, dear fellow," he said. "You'll see—quite all right."

It was so futile—so like a parody of everything that he had imagined, that Brodie nearly laughed. And yet there was comfort in that diffident touch. "You know how it is sometimes," Quinn went on. "At night when one is tired everything gets out of proportion. The least

pain is a deadly illness and every little loss irreparable. But in the morning we see things as they really are. And they are never quite so bad, are they?"

"No," said Brodie, with a long sigh.

"You'll see!" said Alec Quinn, confidently.

He built up the fire in the little grate and set the kettle on. From a curtained recess he produced a tray of cold meat and salad and fruit with a paper napkin and an absurd vase of flowers that Brodie at once knocked over. His host mopped up the water with an apologetic fastidiousness.

"It was stupid of me to put them there," he said. "But I like flowers everywhere when I can get them. I'll put them on the mantleshef. You can see them there just as well."

Everything that he did was done delicately and with a queer eagerness, as though it pleased him. But he himself was an uncouth and clumsy figure. His clothes, even in their hey-day, had never fitted him. His coat threatened to slip off his sloping shoulders and his trousers were too slackly braced, so that they trailed over his heels with an effect that was comically elephantine. He seemed aware of a contradiction in himself, for he looked back at Brodie with his shy and rather winning smile.

"As you see, I'm a bit of a collector," he said. "My books and pictures are my friends and I have never parted with one of them—not in the worst days. Before the war I used to lecture on beauty in Art and Literature in private schools—though perhaps you wouldn't think so to look at me."

"I wouldn't think it to look at your pictures," Brodie answered roughly. It was as though he had to assert himself against these baffling surroundings. "I don't

pretend to understand that sort of thing—but you'd have hard work to lecture them into being beautiful."

"They need knowing," Quinn murmured. He poured out the coffee into the solitary cup. "Perhaps you'll feel better towards them when you've eaten," he added gravely.

"Aren't you going to have something too?"

"Thanks, I had my supper before I came out."

He squatted down before the fire with his face between his thin, unlovely hands. The boyish pose would have sat oddly on his middle, age had it not been so natural. It was obvious that he was much alone and that in his loneliness he unconsciously gave way to the youth that amongst their fellows men strive to conceal. His nervous excitability had died down. He seemed at ease and happy. From time to time he threw Brodie a long glance of content.

"I like to see you sitting there in my chair," he said, as though in explanation, "and to know that you've come through and won't have to go back. Perhaps you think it rather impertinent that I should feel like that about a stranger. But so many men have sat there. Last year in March, when things were looking so black and they were pouring troops across—anything they could get hold of—I used to meet men called back from Scotland and Wales—all over the place—and keep them here till their leave train left. Some of them were almost old men and some of them just children—homesick children—going to die. It was the saddest thing—that's why I feel about you as I do." He waited a moment, adjusting his glasses tremblingly. When he spoke again it was with a forced lightness. "Still I expect you must think me the queerest kind of fish—

pouncing on you and bringing you here. I wonder what you make of it?"

"I suppose you've lost someone," Brodie said. "I've heard of people doing that sort of thing."

The other seemed to shrink back into himself. "Oh, no, it's not that. I've not lost anyone—not in that way."

Thereafter he was very silent. When Brodie had finished eating he cleared the tray and produced, rather proudly, a tobacco jar and a new briar pipe. He turned the gas low, so that there was only firelight in the room, and opened the window.

"It's not cold," he said, "and you can listen to London awhile. When you haven't heard it for a long time it's like music."

Brodie nodded gratefully. He liked this man and he felt happier. Quinn had been right. Sheer physical exhaustion had thrown him off his balance. He had expected the impossible. It was stupid to wait until he could write himself. He had left no time. She had never had his letters. To-morrow everything would come true.

And as the terror loosened its hold on him he began to talk to his strange, half-visible companion, at first tentatively of things of common interest and then of all that had happened to him. He knew that Quinn wanted to hear. He could feel him, crouched tensely, watching him through the red twilight. He told him of Ursula. That was inevitable. His heart spilled over. Usually, however much he might want to, he found it difficult to express himself, but now the words came—a queer medley from the trenches and the suburbs—but vivid in their sincerity.

And it seemed to him that as he talked the troubling

pictures on the wall grew less strange—that the room warmed to him.

He spoke also of the future.

"Of course, I shan't stay in the army. That's not my job. But there'll be good things going for men who've done decently and come through sound like me. Anyhow, I'm going to peg away at whatever turns up. I'm not afraid. Ursula ought to be a swell's wife—and she's going to be if I can work it."

It grew late and at last a gentle drowsiness changed hopes and adventures into dreams and he fell silent. But Quinn still brooded over the fire.

"You'll be happy," he said at last. "You've come through and you're going to a wife who loves you. You've done well for yourself. It's been a sort of miracle—but I'm not thinking of that. Things like that can fail one—but you'll never be quite down and out. Whatever happens, you'll have one thing to hold on to—that you saw the light from the beginning and followed it to the end. It's terrible—terrible to have been blind."

Brodie did not understand. He was half asleep. He heard beyond the curiously tense voice the ceaseless murmur of the streets. He was thinking that somewhere not far off Ursula heard it too—not knowing of him or of to-morrow.

But in the night he woke up suddenly and, hearing his companion toss on the truckle bed opposite his own, remembered without apparent reason what he had said.

"It is terrible to have been blind."

CHAPTER VI

1

FOR HALF the length of the Row Ursula had known that she was being followed. At first the thud of hoofs had exhilarated her because there were few horses that her own mare could not outdistance and, with an intuitive recognition of the pursuer, it had pleased her to exert her superiority. But now she was growing angry. The invisible horseman was too deliberate, too courteous and too certain. He ran no risk of driving her animal to a bolt. He took his time. He knew that he had only to wait.

She drew rein a minute later and Esmé Monteith cantered up beside her.

"I knew it was you," she said breathlessly. "No one else does things like that——"

"I hope not," he said. "I may say I didn't want to pursue you in this public way, either. But first I bowed to you, regardless of etiquette, and then I called to you, regardless of everything, but you would neither look nor listen. So I had to take the offensive——"

"I don't see why," she said, considering him with cold eyes, "unless you can't help yielding to every whim. I expected you to cut me. That's the reason I didn't look at you."

"That's a reproach," he said, placidly.

"Yes, it is," she admitted, moving her horse to a walk.

He kept pace with her.

"Most men would be enormously flattered to think they were able to hurt you into reproaching them. But I am only sorry. That speaks well for me, doesn't it? I honestly didn't expect to hurt you."

"Then you didn't know me, after all," she replied, "and we weren't the friends I thought we were."

"Was I such a friend?"

"Aren't you still?" she shrugged her shoulders. "No, you can't be. Friends don't drop one like you did. They stick to one all through. It's months since you came near us."

"I have not set foot inside your house since the eleventh of November, 1918," he calculated deliberately.

"Armistice day——"

"The night I knew you were married." She was silent and he turned his lean dark face towards her with a faint smile. "But I didn't 'drop out' at all. I've been very active where you are concerned. I've been hating you so, my dear, that this is the first day I could trust myself to speak to you. My absence has been the measure of my consideration for you—and for myself. There are truths we should never say to those we love. They are too true to be forgiven."

She met him unflinchingly.

"I don't know a bit what you mean, Esmé. Why should you hate me? What truths?"

"You know as well as I do," he retorted. "You're only hedging to give yourself time. Still we might as well have it out quickly. You know that in 1914 you meant to be my wife——"

She laughed outright—genuinely and heartily.

"Did I? I don't remember saying so. I don't even remember your asking me."

"I didn't ask you," he persisted, unmoved. "I had it all fixed up for the shooting party on the twelfth of August, 1914. You remember—we were both going down to my uncle's place. Everybody knew what I meant—you included. If you deny it I shall be obliged to tell you that you lie."

"I can't deny anything. You might have planned to fly to the moon."

"That's merely flippant. But I'll nail you down. In the certain event of my asking you you meant to accept me——"

"Suppose I did mean to? You never asked me."

"The war broke out on August 4," he continued, in the tone of a judge marshalling the facts of a case. "I rejoined my regiment on the sixth. I foresaw that the business was likely to be a long one and that my chances of coming through—at any rate, in a presentable form—were very slender. That settled it. As a man of honour, I could not bind you."

She became grave, dropping her light tone like an uneasily worn disguise.

"Now you have said something that it would have been better not to say, Esmé. Because I know what you really mean. You are trying to cast a slur on the man who did bind me."

"That was not my intention. Still, I have said what I meant. I can't take it back. Men have a certain code in these things."

"My husband was a man." He did not answer, and she was silent for a moment, steadying her voice. "You're being very honest with me, Esmé," she said at last, looking straight ahead of her, "and now I'll be honest with you. Women have a code, too—and men who aren't infatuated with their own ideas know it

and respect it. Adam knew. If you really loved me and if you really thought I loved you, you did me a great wrong. If Adam had gone away and left me he would have broken my heart."

"He has broken your heart anyhow," Menteith exclaimed bitterly. For the first time he had allowed emotion to break through his perfect suavity and he made a gesture of apology. "I ought not to have spoken, after all—I underestimated my feeling. It wasn't really hatred. You must forgive me, Ursula. I am frightfully unhappy."

She pressed her lips together. The unexpected poignancy of his tone had broken through her defence. "I can't bear you to say that, Esmé. It isn't fair that—you should be unhappy."

"It's as bad for both of us," he answered. "We're in the same boat anyhow."

But she shook her head.

"I'm not frightfully unhappy. And my heart isn't broken. It's funny—but it isn't. That first night—when I couldn't hope any more—I could have smashed the world for what had happened to me, but that didn't last. I often wonder myself how it is that I feel so quiet—so at peace about things. I think it is perhaps because there is nothing ugly to remember or regret. It was such a short time but it was so perfect. Some people get their happiness like that—don't they?"

"I don't know," he said wryly.

"And then I am very proud," she added in an undertone. "It's like an inspiration. I should feel myself a traitor—to go about hanging my head."

"You've been spared disillusionment," he said. "Death is the only thing that can save us from that." He saw her flush of pain and anger and smiled rather grimly.

"I am not quite the cad you seem to think I am, Ursula. I am not jeering at the source of your inspiration but I am telling you a general truth. Look at the people round you. Or don't you ever look at them? I don't believe you do. But if you did you would see what I mean. If ever a people fought under an inspiration it was the English. We genuinely believed that we were doing the right thing and the chivalrous thing. Never mind what our politicians thought. The first two million offered themselves because an intolerable wrong had been done to a weak neighbour. It never entered their thick heads that we were menaced. Think of the poetry we turned out—the most exquisite stuff by men who at the most had been mere word-jugglers. Yes, it was an inspiration all right. And what has come of it? Look at the faces you see in the street. They'll tell you. The men are coming back asking what it was all about—why they fought and why millions are dead. They fought for a millenium and there isn't any millenium—just the same old hell packed with the same old greedy grabbing crowd. Something better may grow out of it in a generation or two, but what's that to us? We can't even be sure of ourselves. We go about whispering that we went into the war to grab Timbuctoo or the dye trade. We survivors—we're sick with disillusion—the lot of us—every class. Some of us take to cocaine and some of us to strikes—but it's the same thing at bottom. We know not what. All we do know is that life's a rotten stupid business. We don't believe in anything. We haven't a hero—we haven't an ideal that we don't secretly distrust. Haven't you noticed how we receive our men back? There's no heart to it. We're tired—tired to death—and incredulous of all good. But the dead are safe. They went out while they had the truth in their

hands—and whilst they were still heroes. They're the lucky ones—believe me, Ursula."

She heard the personal bitterness in his voice with a wondering trouble. It was not like him to show pain—to appear to take life very seriously. The very word "ideals" sounded strange on his lips. Unconsciously or deliberately he was betraying himself.

"You may be right," she said sadly. "I don't know. I've been, as you say, very blind to things outside myself. We've had sorrow of our own. Mother is ill, you know. It's this terrible pretence that everything's all right and that there isn't any death that's killing her. And there's grandfather fighting, fighting with his back to the wall. I don't seem to have thought of anything else——"

"I know," he said gently. "Did you really think I had dropped out, Ursula? One day I'll show you a little diary I have kept. It's a record of your doings—day by day. I got them from Margaret. Margaret's sorry for me in her erratic fashion. I've led a dog's life chasing her from one mad festivity to another—picking up the scraps she dropped for me. There's nothing you need tell me that I don't know." His voice lightened— "and some things perhaps I can tell you that you've forgotten——"

She looked at him and met his eyes fixed on her with an unveiled, if faintly smiling, tenderness. His were the only brown eyes that she had ever liked. They were neither soft nor sensual. There was humour and steadfastness in them and a quality of fire. Even their expression, which was deliberate and provocative, could not check her pleasure in them or in the man himself. She was too remote from him to feel anything but sorrow for his sorrow.

But finally she looked away from him without speaking.

They had reached the Marble Arch gates and crossed through the traffic to Great Cumberland Street. Within sight of the waiting groom Ursula turned to Monteith again.

"I'm glad you've come back," she said. "You *have* come back, haven't you?"

"For good," he answered.

"Then there's one thing I want to say," she went on hurriedly. "So that we need not talk of it again. It's quite true—I did mean to marry you, Esmé. But I didn't treat you unfairly. Because I didn't love you—not as I found I could love——"

"And as you would have learnt to love me," he added.

She shook her head.

"No—no—if you think that, it's no good—we can't be friends——"

"I don't want to be friends," he answered smiling. He grew grave at once and something crept into his voice that was new to her—a tone metallic and formidable. "I too have something to say once and for all, Ursula. I want you to be my wife. I think one day you will be—if Major Brodie were alive I should be sure of it——"

She had no time to answer. In spite of her efforts to avoid them it was he who helped her to dismount and in a fleeting glimpse of his face her bitterness faltered. She had not understood him. It was not possible. He was the old playfellow and friend, kindly, affectionate, imperturbably loyal.

"I'm giving a tea-party for you and Margaret next week," he said cheerfully. "I want to show you some

Japanese prints I picked up at an auction. They're the best things I've ever struck—keep an afternoon free."

He waited. He saw someone in the shadowy hall speak to her and give a letter into her hand. Then the door closed against him.

2

The maid had admitted Brodie doubtfully and in the course of repeating himself he had grown confused, tangling his sentences, so that what he said sounded unconvincing even in his own ears. Finally the girl had taken his letter and glanced at the inscription and back at him again, with the expressionless directness of the punctilious official that she was.

"I want you to give her that note when she comes in," he had said. "Then—then—if it's all right—you can tell her that I am here——"

"What name shall I give her, sir?"

"No name. You see—it'll be in the letter. She'll know——"

"Shouldn't I announce you to the mistress, sir?"

"No, no. I can't see anyone until I have seen Miss Seton——"

The girl had turned away and led him up into this room. He had felt her distrust and unfriendliness. He would like to have confided in her and put things right. Instead he had committed what he saw now had been a final blunder. At the drawing-room door he had offered her half-a-crown.

"Keep the coast clear—there's a good girl——"

She had drawn back without so much as a change of colour.

"I will tell Miss Ursula as soon as she comes in, sir."

The whole thing had been the result of an irresistible

impulse. He had meant to make a casual inquiry and to leave the letter which was to prepare her. But suddenly the waiting had become impossible. There had been something about the quiet hall—an atmosphere that was like a faint elusive fragrance—that had made her presence almost actual. This was her home. A while ago she had been here—in a few minutes she might be here again. The thought had swept him off his feet. To have turned back would have been to act like a passionless coward——

If only she had come then! But half an hour had passed and then an hour. In spite of everything his brain cooled, though his heart continued to thud out its wild and exultant march of expectation. He began to hear the sounds of the house. People passed softly on the stairs and once the handle of the door had been half turned. He imagined someone coming in and their astonishment and his own floundering explanation.

“Excuse me—I’m waiting for Ursula——”

“I’m Major Brodie—I wasn’t killed after all, you see.”

“I’m Ursula’s husband.”

But perhaps no one knew. The maid had said “Miss Ursula.” In that case he had more than blundered—he had not played fair.

The room added to his growing sense of forlornness. It was very big, square and high ceilinged, and full of things that he could not get into proper focus. In the grotesque way they eluded him they reminded him of the potatoes he had never been able to count. And they were not what he had expected, they were so various—so carelessly arranged—a little of this and that—without thought or method or any obvious colour scheme. In all the great houses of which he had read

the rooms had suites of furniture—in the dining-room plush of some warm and masculine hue and in the drawing-room brocade—light blue and gold probably—with a light blue carpet and water colours on the wall to match. And cut glass chandeliers. Here he could not even see where they had their lights—or if there were any.

He tried sitting down, but his restlessness goaded him to his feet again. Besides, no one had invited him—and a gentleman did not sit down until he was invited. Wherever he stood, he seemed lost and yet too conspicuous. At last he took refuge by the window. It was an old-fashioned bow-window and he could see right down the street as far as the park. And there were two riders coming slowly towards him.

He knew her, though the costume she wore was unfamiliar and her face was turned from him. He knew her, if only by the frantic leap of his pulses. But he himself did not move.

Queer how he forgot that life went on—that people ate and drank and slept and even laughed. He had done these things himself. What had he expected?

She disappeared, and in the pause he heard the door open—and a sudden hush as tense and poignant as his own waiting. He swung round. Suddenly it was all right with him—everything was all right. The old confidence, the glory of their mating and the miracle of this reunion rushed back like giants to the rescue, tearing him free from the net of little impeding things.

She was coming—her feet were on the stairs. It was accomplished. And he went to meet her on a wave of emotion more splendid than anything he had ever dreamed. He hardly saw her face. They came together blindly and in silence. And in silence they remained—clinging to one another.

But in dreams the mind cunningly strips its creations of those intrusions and anti-climaxes which too often make a jest of the reality. It sees the supreme moment and lets down the curtain. But life relentlessly goes on.

So that it was in vain for Ursula and Adam to hold one another in a fierce closeness, barricading their very thoughts against the world. Sooner or later the world would have to be let in. And presently the world announced itself in its own grotesque fashion.

A soft-voiced bell sounded through the quiet house. It sounded twice before Ursula heard it. She drew away from her husband then, though her hands still rested on his shoulders, gripping him with the strength of an incredulous, still fearing happiness.

"I've got to go and tell them, Adam. They'll be sending for me—and mother isn't strong. We mustn't say anything that might hurt or shock her. You must let me go, dear."

"I don't want to," he said thickly. "I don't want people. I want to get right away with you. It's been a hell of a time. I can't talk to people and be ordinary and sensible as though nothing had happened. We've got to make a bolt for it——"

"If we only could——"

"We did once," he whispered.

"Things aren't so simple now. Oh, my darling, it's much, much harder for me. After all, you knew that you were alive and that I was alive and that you were coming back to me. But you've been dead—and I'd taught myself to go on alone—somehow—and now you're here—and I don't know whether I'm mad or dead myself. How shall I behave do you think?"

He lifted her to her feet beside him.

"Let's get away," he urged. "It's the only thing——"

For the moment the headlong impulse was almost too strong for her. It did seem the only thing. The desire to escape was like a panic-stricken instinct infecting them both. They were weak and trembling, their happiness too great not to be interchangeable with pain, and the thought of what lay before them, dimly as they foresaw it, was like pressure on already straining nerves.

But in the end she held her ground.

"We can't—it isn't practical. Besides it would be cruel. They know—I told them ages ago—when I thought you were dead—and it hurt them terribly. But they were so decent about it. I couldn't hurt them again. Then it was five days—now we have our whole lives. We can afford it."

"But then you'll come away," he persisted.

"I'll never leave you again," she answered with a broken laugh; "—if you mean that—never, never, so long as I live——"

He went with her to the door, his arm about her shoulders, holding her back, almost sullen in his reluctance and yet remorseful and uneasy.

"P'raps it was rather rotten of me to come like this—I couldn't help it, little girl. All at once I'd got to the end of my tether. I'd written—and you weren't there."

"I never had your letter. It must have been forwarded on to Ivonrood. Oh, Adam I can't bear to think of your hunting the station for me—or of what you felt. It hurts me."

"I was afraid," he said stammeringly. "Anything might have happened—and I tell you what—it's queer—I'm sort of afraid now——"

She put her arms about him and kissed him in a storm of passion.

"There's nothing to be afraid of—nothing has happened—we've got each other forever—it's all right now."

In the interval before Ursula came back the three Setons had time to come face to face with themselves, each in his own fashion.

Margaret, who had been waiting by the library window, went on with her letter. She took up her broken sentence without an effort.

"—And I think the idea of Youth and Death a scream. Of course I know which I am to be and thanks for the implied compliment. But I must say it takes my fancy. I can see my frock already. I'll get a real skull and perhaps a few live worms to please the Decadents' thirst for realism. What do you think? And I'll bring another man. Ursula's husband, rather appropriately, has just come back from the dead. The grocer's son, you know. Ursula has just broken the news to the family. Poor father is standing by the fireplace wondering what sort of expression to wear. It's very hard to forgive somebody for something you think they haven't really done and then find they've really done it——"

She stopped, smiling to herself, and looked across the room from under the shadow of her hand. Mr. Seton had left his habitual place of defence. He had gone over to his wife's side and was patting her on her frail shoulder as though in this crisis he had nothing left to offer but a conventional gesture.

"My dear," he said. "My dear——"

Then his voice and his ideas alike failed him. He was trembling at the knees and would have sat down but for the insidious fear that he might not be able to stand up again. For all that Ursula had been very gentle—very considerate—she had not been able to spare either of them. If she had not spoken they would still

have known instantly of some tremendous happening. She had blazed with it. She had stood opposite them, frowning a little as though she were trying hard to visualise them, so young, so exultant, and, for all her efforts, so ruthless that they had felt themselves wither as in a high north wind.

Mrs. Seton took her husband's hand and restrained it gently.

"We must be very glad," she said. "We mustn't even feel anything that could spoil her happiness. Happiness is too beautiful. And oh, what wonderful things happen, don't they, Roy? It shows that one must never give up hope."

They had come in a moment later, hand in hand like children. Ursula stood a little in advance. She carried herself more soberly now with a grave, rather pathetic, dignity.

"Father and mother," she said, "this is Adam——"

They looked beyond her to her companion. They saw a fair young man, high cheek boned, heavy jawed and with a desperate pallor under a weather-beaten skin. His disproportionate breadth of shoulder made him seem shorter than he really was—a stolid young man who yet had an elusive and baffling air of delicacy. But then no doubt he had been ill and had suffered—suffering refined people.

His uniform fitted him badly. Either it was the work of a poor tailor or his figure was one of those which nothing ever fitted. The tunic rucked up under the belt and the sleeves were too long, hanging half way over his hands. He did not seem to know what to do with his free hand. He kept on clenching and unclenching it.

The same thought flashed through all three of them. After all—a common young man.

Margaret's ironic glance flitted from one to the other. Her parents would always amuse her. With what an appearance of unassailable self-possession they met life—even now when she knew them to be panic and horror stricken. And Ursula—how absurdly in earnest she was about things. As though anything really mattered!

Mrs. Seton took Adam Brodie's hand and held it for a moment, smiling up at him with that dogged brightness which her family had grown to fear.

"You must forgive us, Major Brodie—we are all a little shaken—but very, very thankful too. Ursula's sorrow and happiness are ours—and—and we rejoice with you both. Don't we, Roy?"

Mr. Seton nodded. His own feelings frightened him. A sense of outrage battled violently with the desire to do and say nothing that might not become him or the situation. It was impossible to know which of the two antagonists would come uppermost.

"My wife speaks for us all," he said, "—even though I confess frankly things were done in a way—eh—calculated to hurt us—a way which I cannot approve—still we have done our best to understand—and in any case we realise that what is done cannot be undone—"

Mrs. Seton interrupted gently.

"—the past is past. And I think we have understood. That's what my husband means, isn't it, Roy?"

"Yes," said Mr. Seton doggedly.

Brodie flushed with the effort to answer them. Their emotion had melted his vague antagonism to an impulsive friendliness. The clasp of their hands was that of loyal people. It was stupid to have been afraid. And in turn he wanted to reassure them. They had been ridden over rough-shod. He saw that quite clearly now. In his own

happiness he could not bear that they should be unhappy.

"It's jolly decent of you—I sort of know how you felt. You must have thought me no end of a bounder. But Ursula and I loved each other—and the war was on—and there it was—" For the first time he met Margaret Seton's eyes and faltered. "—We couldn't 'elp ourselves," he said.

CHAPTER VII

1

IT WAS raining and the bus was crowded with a soaked and silent humanity. At every stopping place a little bunch of men and women swept out like a skirmishing party, only to retire discomfited as the monster careered disdainfully past them. One attacker, bolder or more desperate than the rest, swung himself on board, colliding with the conductor who rang the bell.

"You can just get off again," he said angrily. "Can't you see we're full up——"

The man pushed past, stumbling over the impeding feet with an almost comic fury. He was a little man, pale faced and sloping shouldered, who did not look as though heroic or violent parts came easily to him.

"I've got to get 'ome some'ow, 'aven't I?" he demanded shrilly. "I've got to get 'ome——"

"Well, you don't get 'ome on this bus any'ow. Get me into trouble, that's what you'll do."

The bus was slowing up. The voice grew more plaintive.

"It ain't right. I'm an 'ard working man and I've waited an hour already. I've got to get 'ome some'ow."

"Maybe the missis ain't worrying over you as much as you think she is," the conductor retorted sardonically. "Any'ow it ain't my fault. Off you gets."

The bus had stopped. The little man looked down the double row of impassive faces.

"It ain't right—it's enough to make a chap go Bolshevik——"

But the forces of law and order were at present too much for him. He had begun to wriggle his defeated way out again when Brodie became aware of him and of his small despairing face.

"Here, you can have my seat—I'm getting out in a minute or two anyhow—it doesn't matter——"

The little man sat down with a deep sigh of relief. The conductor punched his ticket.

"I got ter do my duty," he said almost apologetically. "It's a dawg's life, ain't it?"

Brodie walked on slowly. He was rather glad of the delay. It gave him time to think and to recognise the old places. Things could not have changed, of course, and yet he felt as though he had come back to them after many years. He could only connect them with his childhood. He remembered the little boy who had peered longingly into the sweetshop at the street corner—now empty of everything save boxes—or stolen rides on the tram-car while the conductor collected fares. But the resplendent young man in the jaunty straw hat and the gay tie who had idled at street corners waiting for romance, sometimes in the shape of his cousin Clara Brodie, and sometimes in the shape of Maud Smith, the chemist's daughter, seemed a dim and distant figure. It was as though all the middle years had been smeared over with a great sponge.

And things had changed too. They had grown older. They had suffered a great deal. The houses had been left unpainted and the shop signs had become dim. The people had changed most of all. They waited at the

corners for the congested seething buses or toiled on homewards through the rain with a grey patience that held a hint of anger. They did not look like a people who had just celebrated a great victory. They looked like a people who had endured until the very reason of their endurance had been forgotten. Brodie thought of the little man with his pale harassed face and plaintive reiteration and of the conductor, sullenly clinging to his duty.

"It's a dawg's life——"

Something of their weariness and exasperation and puzzlement was in everything—and in everybody.

Out there on the German plain Brodie, when times had been very bad, had closed his eyes and imagined flags flying and bands playing and orators making fiery speeches from the public places. In one dream the mob had caught sight of him, Brodie, modestly standing on the outskirts, and had seized him and carried him shoulder high, singing—"For he's a jolly good fellow——" Ursula had been there too, watching him with proud eyes. He always managed to bring her in somehow.

"If anyone had told me I'd have laughed," he thought.

Even now he could not really see how it had happened. Nothing had ever seemed more fixed and inevitable than that Ursula should come away with him and that they should go on with their life together as they had begun it—alone. There was no choice about it. It had been as strong in him as the instinct of self-preservation.

And yet here he was.

He hadn't even put up a fight. They had just done what they liked with him. And it wasn't as though it was a thing people usually managed. "Stubborn as a mule," Mrs. Brodie had said of him often enough. He

went over the whole business, trying to get to the bottom of himself.

There was the lunch they had all had together. The maid who had admitted him had waited at table. Queer what a part she played. If she had smiled or shown any trace of confusion, somehow things would have been easier. He would have nodded reassurance—made her feel that it was all a good joke—her trying to keep out “Miss Ursula’s” husband! But her expression had not changed by a shadow. She had looked at him as she had looked at everybody else—through him as though he were not really there at all—as though nothing had any actuality or significance except the vegetables.

But there was that half-crown. She knew about it. She hadn’t forgotten. Perhaps behind that mask she was laughing—or was she angry—or merely contemptuous?

The possibility had made him fumble, spilling his potatoes.

Everything had been so quiet. The dishes had seemed to vanish by miracle. The Setons had low voices and their movements had the repose of absolute confidence. They had talked to him with their natural courtesy, encouraging him to tell his story, though he felt that they were already out of touch with the things he had lived through, and that they were only interested in them because they helped to show them the kind of man he was. And he had blundered and stumbled, making those months of torture a bald and almost comic thing.

“The old German lady must have had a rare sense of humour,” Margaret Seton had said.

And they had laughed.

He had sat there, crumbling his bread, staring down at the table-cloth, blind with absurd tears.

Ursula had sat opposite him. She still wore her

riding-habit, and her red-brown hair was drawn back straight from her face, lending a boyish but unfamiliar charm to her irregular features. It was as though he had seen a new side to her. Behind the passionateness of mouth and eyes there was something that he divined dimly for the first time—something indeed only half developed like her womanhood—an inflexibility that was almost hardness—an austerity of judgment that might be pitiless.

For one crazy moment he had been afraid.

Then she was his Ursula again—the generous, loving girl, holding him with her proud eyes.

Yes, they had done what they liked with him.

“You see, my dear fellow, one must be reasonable,” Mr. Seton had said. “You must know, of course, that there has been a great deal of gossip and, for all our sakes, we must do nothing that would cause a revival. People had been told that your marriage had our sanction. Your sudden departure would make them wonder again. You have as yet no home to go to. This is a big house and you two can take what quarters you like. Nothing is more natural than that—you should stay with us until you see your way more clearly. Besides—” he had added gracefully, “—we have a right to know you better, Major.”

It had been unanswerable. And Ursula had failed him. She saw things as they saw them.

They had taken it for granted that he had no home. His family did not count. And he had suffered from a foolish rush of anger and resentment.

“I’ll have to run along and see my own folk,” he had muttered finally. “They don’t even know I’m alive—”

They had assented. It was quite natural that he should want to go.

"You must bring them to see us one day," Mrs. Seton had said, gently.

And so the incredible thing had come about. On their first wonderful day he had left her. She had come out into the hall with him and, regardless of the condemning shadows, he had caught her in his arms and held her to him as though years of separation stood before them.

"Do you remember Fontainebleau, little wife?"

"It's going to be Fontainebleau always—everywhere," she had answered.

If he hadn't dropped that "h" he might have stood up for himself. He had always known that his "h's" were an uncertain quantity and had never cared. It hadn't mattered in the shop, or in the ranks, or in the Mess. All the fellows knew was that he was a good sort, and could fight better than most men in a tight place, and had the lives of a cat.

But Margaret Seton had laughed. Not unkindly—rather with a kind of understanding—without moving a muscle of her face.

Even now, when he remembered her, he grew so hot and stiff with shame that he could hardly walk.

2

He turned into the quiet well-remembered street. A soaking dusk had settled in and most of the little shops were shut so that the place had a forsaken melancholy air. There was not even the familiar streak of light above the shutters of "Thomas Brodie and Son," so that Mrs. Brodie had finished her accounts already. Business was slack perhaps. Somehow one felt that things had not been going very well in Edgberton Street. It served the little respectable people who were too respectable to clamour because life grew dearer and their

incomes less and too little to matter much anyhow. And with them Edgberton Street had grown quieter and greyer.

Adam Brodie stood hesitating on the opposite pavement. Though he was tired and wet through, his heart had begun to beat with a deep excitement. How often had he waited here after some boyish escapade, summoning his courage to face his mother's wrath and condemnation? That had been in the days when "Thomas Brodie—Grocer" had seemed the biggest, finest shop in town. Now he saw that it was a little bit of a place—smaller even than it had been in his memory, as though the hard years had withered it. And he had come back to it from great adventure—with such honourable distinction that even his mother would look up to him. Tomorrow his father would be telling his story over the counter to his neighbours and customers, so proud and happy that he would forget everything else, and the accounts be wrong for weeks.

"My son, you know, Major Brodie, has just come home——"

And Clara—why Clara had always believed in him anyway.

There was a light shining in an upper window and Brodie sent a penny spinning up so cunningly that it just grazed the glass. It was an old signal which he had used when there had been a row and he had wanted Clara to come down and sympathise with him and go to the pictures, where they had sat hand in hand. He had not cared much about holding hands, but Clara had seemed to like it.

It was as though she had been expecting him. The light was lowered instantly—he remembered how gas-saving had been second nature to them all—and he

crossed the street only a moment before the side door opened. The light in the passage had not been lit yet, but he could feel her eyes straining through the darkness.

Suddenly he realised how rash and almost cruel he had been. He spoke very quietly.

"Clara, don't you scream or anything. It's all right. It's me, Adam. I'm not a ghost either. Don't make a fuss, there's a good girl. I don't want them frightened——"

To his amazement she did not answer. She drew him by his sleeve into the passage and closed the door. He knew that she was trembling from head to foot. So they remained for a moment, so close to one another that he could feel her quick, hard-drawn breath on his face.

"Addy, why didn't you come sooner? We've been waiting for you, day after day. It's been awful. Why didn't you write?"

"I didn't know you knew," he answered in a whisper. "Who told you?"

"Young Perkins. He had it from another chap who'd seen you in the hospital. We didn't believe it, but I went off to the War Office and badgered them till I got it out of them. Ah, Addy, what did yer do it for?"

Her voice sounded unfamiliar. Clara's voice had been shrill. Now it was low and broken, as though she had been crying—not just once, but often.

He laid his hand on her arm.

"I'm awfully sorry. I'll explain it all. If I'd known I'd have written. Never mind about that now. You're glad I'm back, aren't you, old girl?"

He heard a harsh sob break from her. She flung her arms about him and he could feel her cheek wet with tears.

"Is that you, Adam?"

The door at the end of the passage had opened, and there was his mother's broad shadow outlined against the lighted room beyond. All at once he was not the returning hero any more, but a little boy doubtful of his reception.

"Yes, it's me all right, mother."

He went up to her lumberingly, with a kind of guilty light-heartedness, and kissed her. He had never been able to kiss his mother properly—just an embarrassed peck on either side of her face. She was too big and inflexible for kissing.

"You've worried us no end, Adam. We've kept the supper back every day this week thinking you'd come. We haven't known what to think. Where have you been? Why didn't you write?"

She was agitated almost to incoherency. He had never known her so moved, and he went into the little sitting room with his hand on her shoulder, almost as though he had never been afraid of her.

"I didn't think you knew a thing about me except that I was dead, mother, or of course I'd have written. But I'll tell you about it presently and you'll understand."

His father sat in his favourite place at the round table under the lamp. He had taken off his coat, as he always did when he read, and he read whenever he could, just as soon as the shutters were up, the Bible, or the romantic pages of the home journals, or Adam's old story books. He read with a kind of frustrated hunger, and it was hard work for him because his eyes were failing, and his education did not reckon to deal with words of more than two syllables.

He had been spelling out "The Adventures of Dick

Turpin" and the tattered paper covered volume still trembled in his hands. He did not even get up, but sat very quiet with a distraught look on his wrinkled face, as if he were afraid the storm of happiness would sweep him off his feet.

"Adam—my boy—my dear, dear boy——"

Brodie put his arms about him and held him close, as though he were a child. So they remained together for several moments, clinging to each other. Then the old man drew away, wiping his eyes under their crooked glasses.

"I couldn't believe it, Addy. It's a miracle. I kept on saying to myself, 'It can't be. There's lots of other Brodies in the world. It can't be mine.' Even now I don't sort of know if it's not just something I've dreamed."

"It's all right, father. I'm real enough. Don't you worry——"

Mr. Brodie put his son's hand to his cheek.

"It's a lesson to me. I doubted the goodness of God. You can ask your mother. I've said bitter blasphemous things and she's reprov'd me. And she was right. God 'as mercy, Addy, in his own good time. I'm a poor sort and the Lord knows it and tempered the wind."

"You mustn't cry, father. It's all over now."

Mr. Brodie nodded. He sat up straight with a gal-lant gesture, clenching his veined hands to fists.

"You're right, dear boy. Crying's foolish. But it's been a bad, bad time. It's sort of shaken one so that it's hard to believe in good times again. And we're not so young as we were. We can't pick up."

"You'll pick up now, Dad."

"Yes, yes; we'll pick up—now we've got you home again."

Adam sat down by his father's side and the old man turned to him, measuring him with a trembling eagerness—

"And how you've grown, Addy! A big broad man, ain't he, mother? And the uniform and all. I know what that crown means. There was an officer came into the shop and I asks him. I tells him, 'My son's a Major too—Major Adam Brodie.' He was surprised, I can tell you. We don't look the sort to 'ave an officer and a gentleman in the family, do we, mother?"

"We're respectable people," Mrs. Brodie returned. "I've never set my mind on being anything better. You'd have spared your father a lot, Adam, if you'd written."

"I know, mother, I'm sorry. There were circumstances. I'll tell you about them presently."

He felt that the two women were watching him. They were moved, too, but not like the old man, to a blind abandonment. Their instinct had felt the reserve in him. His mother's face was set in its usual white expressionless calm, but Clara Brodie had a look of distrust in her red-rimmed eyes. She had changed a great deal. She was thinner and less florid than in the old days. But she still wore the turquoise ear-rings he had given her.

"You can tell us about things over supper," his mother said. "We've kept it back long enough. It's a bit of steak too. 'Tisn't often we see steak these days."

She pulled the cloth out of the mahogany sideboard and set "Dick Turpin" impatiently back on the bookshelf. "You can dish up, Clara. We don't all need to be standing round gaping."

"All right—I'm going——"

But she did not go. She fidgeted about the room, waiting—listening.

"We've kept the little business safe for you, Addy,"

Mr. Brodie said. "It's been a hard pull. The regulations told 'eavy on us little tradesmen. Some of 'em I never rightly understood. If it hadn't been for our mother we'd 'ave 'ad to put up the shutters. All these coupons just led me. But your mother stuck to it. Even when it didn't seem no good, she stuck to it. She wouldn't give in."

"You were fine," Adam muttered. "Fine—the whole lot of you—fine——"

Mr. Brodie looked round with his tremulous smile.

"It's all pretty much as you left it, Addy. Shabbier, of course. But now we'll be able to do things—a bit of paint outside—and—and—repapering 'ere and there. We'll have to touch up the 'Brodie and Son' and make it stand out clear. It's a pity we couldn't stick the 'Major' in. But people'll know, and you'll be able to wear your ribbon on your overall, and your gold stripe."

Brodie did not answer. He felt that the room was growing smaller—closing in on him. The dust of little remembered things was in his throat, choking him.

"You'd better give your father time to get his breath," Mrs. Brodie said. "You'll be wanting a wash and brush up before supper. Your room's waiting for you."

Adam stood up instinctively.

"Thank you, mother. I'll get along. But I'd better tell you now—I shan't be sleeping here."

He knew that his father hardly heard. But the two women were like tigers who had been waiting.

Mrs. Brodie set down the cruets-stand.

"Not sleeping here——?"

"No. That's one of the things I've got to tell you. I'm going back to my wife. You see—I'm married."

He told them everything. He had thought it would be easier to tell them because they were his own people. But half way through he wondered if they understood what he was saying. He wondered, with a chill in his heart, if he had begun to talk a language of his own which no one understood.

They were very quiet. At first they made a pretence of eating, but gradually even their conventionality failed. Mr. Brodie alone kept up an air of tremulous happiness.

"The Hon. Setons," he reflected, rumpling up his fluffy white hair. "Great Cumberland Street—I don't seem to remember that—but then I don't go West much these days."

"I saw her picture in the Tatler once," Clare Brodie said with a shrill laugh. "Miss Ursula Seton—granddaughter of Lord Somebody or other. In a Red Cross uniform. Much Red Cross work she did, you bet."

"She was in the hospital with me when it was bombed," Adam Brodie said, looking at her.

The two women exchanged glances.

"So you'll be living with them. You won't be coming back here again, Adam."

He tried to laugh.

"Why, of course I will, mother. What do you think? Often——"

"You won't come back to the shop though——"

He met her eyes squarely. It was a duel between them.

"No. It's better to be straight out—I can't come back. I've got to make my way—get on—I shouldn't have a chance here."

"You mean your fine lady wouldn't let you. It

wouldn't suit your fine lady to have her husband serving behind a counter."

He was silent. There was a damning, cruel element of truth in the accusation. And it was damnably false.

"We've moiled and toiled," Mrs. Brodie said with a heavy bitterness. "And that's all we get. Moiled and toiled for nothing and nobody. When we've gone somebody else'll have the shop. We've built up a tidy, honest little business, but what's the good of it all? We've got a son who's too fine just to earn an honest living. He knows how to get on better than that."

"Mother!"

Mr. Brodie interposed gently, hesitatingly, as though he did not quite understand what was going on.

"We mustn't be angry—not to-night—Addy's first night home."

"—Not that we've got to worry about you," she went on, a white glare of contempt on her big face. "Your fine lady'll have money enough to keep you both—or her people'll give you a job—the sort of job they give to hangers-on. You're all right. You've feathered a pretty nest for yourself."

He brought his fist down on the table with a violence that silenced her by its sheer unexpectedness.

"That's enough, mother. You've no right. I've made my way before. They didn't make me Major because I was your son." He broke off, ashamed and wretched, hurt more by his mother's look of incredulous consternation than by her taunts. He had defied her—shouted her down. There was something ugly and pitiable in the victory. "I'm sorry," he muttered. "But there are things even you haven't a right to say. I'm not going to take money I haven't earned or a job I haven't got for myself. That's straight, once and for all."

No one spoke. Mrs. Brodie got up and began putting things back into the sideboard. He saw how shaken she was, because the cruet-stand went onto a shelf where he had never seen it before.

"I'm sorry, mother," he repeated humbly.

He had forgotten Clara. Now she struck at him like an adder.

"You ought to be sorry. Pretty ways the Huns taught you. I suppose you palled up with them, didn't you?"

He burst out laughing.

"Don't be a silly, Clara."

But his unhappiness remained. More even than his mother's anger and humiliation, his father's patient effort to understand troubled him. The old man sat staring down under his spectacles, muttering to himself—

"Well, well—our Addy—married—well, well."

He made an effort to speak lightly, yet firmly.

"Don't you see it's all a great fuss about nothing? It's not my fault. I've been jolted out of the old things—and I've done well for myself in a different way. I didn't make the war—the war made me. It's given me the best girl in the world. You ought to be glad. I might have come back doddering—or smashed up—or not at all. There's no earthly reason why we shouldn't all be happy. They're fine people—the Setons. They've been decent to me. And they want you to come and see them."

His mother turned to him. To his amazement he saw that she was quite calm.

"You've married above your place, Adam," she said. "Well, that's your business. You claim you've got a right to go your own way—and p'r'aps you have. P'r'aps you have. P'r'aps you'll admit we've got a right to go

ours. You've grown very smart out there in the war my lad. But I've seen my bit of life too. I know my place. I don't want any patronising, nor yet to have your grand people shake in their shoes for fear some of their grand friends should drop in whilst I'm about. There's trouble enough going without that."

"Mother, you're all wrong. Things have changed."

"Things may have," she retorted. "'Uman nature hasn't—not that I've seen."

He watched her fascinatedly. He seemed to be slipping back through the years. He was quite small again, and she was his inexorable, inexplicable Destiny:

"Then you won't come?"

"Not as long as I've my senses left me."

"And my wife—can't I bring Ursula here?"

"When she comes ready to put on her apron and serve behind the counter as my daughter should."

He began to see dimly whither she was driving him.

"Can't I come?"

"We can't prevent you, Adam. But if you take my advice you'll stay away. This isn't your home any more. You'd better look things in the face, my lad."

There was nothing more to say. The two women went on clearing away in leaden silence. But Adam felt a hand grope under the table and take his, comforting him.

3

And afterwards when the side-door closed ominously behind him it was that hand-clasp, at once so feeble and so faithful, that was stronger in his memory even than his mother's grim farewell and Clara's eyes with their

sullen, inexplicable misery. It set him free. It gave him up, as if with a gesture of ungrudging renunciation, to the glory of his new life.

The rain had stopped and the great home-going struggle was long since over. Brodie had the top of the bus to himself, and they rumbled swiftly through Camberwell Green and the seething Walworth Road and past the elephant and over the great river. But not swiftly enough. At Trafalgar Square he got down in search of a taxi and, finding none, set out to walk, making short cuts which were not always short because, after all, he did not know his West-end very well. And gradually, for all his passionate haste, the magic of a London night laid hold of him. Still here and there the streets were darker than they used to be and the passers-by were faceless light-footed ghosts. But Piccadilly Circus was a golden lake, fed by a dozen shining rivers. The people who jostled Brodie were not the same people that he had met on the outward journey. They were restless unsatisfied seekers, but at least they sought something. The helplessness had been washed from them. And in the air was a sweet moisture and all the mysterious fragrance of a June night. The rich black shadows of the park trees were a canopy that stirred with a breath that the sea had touched. It was as though the soul of the war-scarred ancient city had thrown off the burden of the year and stretched itself up towards the misty stars, serene and lovely, uncorrupted and incorruptible.

There was nothing but love in Adam Brodie's heart. "You and me—we'll see it through together, my little wife."

Then his memory awoke with an echo from those

other nights when his mother had read to them in her hard unmodulated voice from the old Bible.

"Thy people shall be my people—thy God, my God—and whither thou goest I will go."

He was immensely glad that it had been put so perfectly for him.

"That's fine," he thought. "That's just as it is."

The maid who opened the door opened it wide for him now. She stood far back so that he could hardly see her and it seemed as though the door had opened by magic. His footsteps were lost in the deep muffling carpets. The diffused light from the brass bowl overhead left the hall with its faded portrait in a blurred dimness. Everything about him was a part of the people who were to be his people—restrained, mysterious and profoundly alien. But neither strangeness nor mystery daunted him now. They were the very elements of romance. And his life was a romance—more wonderful than anything he had ever read.

The library door stood open, but no one called to him. There was nothing but the unsteady reflection of a dying fire on the dark walls.

He slipped past. He remembered with a leaping pulse that night when he had slid away under the very shadow of the last German sentry. It was like that now. He was escaping; running the gauntlet of these solemn forbidding doors, faster and faster, to freedom and happiness—three steps at a time.

Then the last door of all.

He closed it, locking it, shutting out all pursuit. He was breathless but exultant, as though a real enemy had been overcome.

By the one shaded light he saw Ursula crouched

down in a white blur by the open window. But he did not move. He stood by the door instinctively defending it, looking at her. The room with its unfamiliar, elusive charm, steeped in the essence of a beloved personality, had hushed the riot in him. Neither did she move. He knew she could not because of what was in himself. On both of them rested an awe of each other and of their happiness that was like fear.

"Adam——"

He came to her then, stumblingly, and knelt down, and she took his face between her hands and kissed him on the eyes and mouth. Her voice with its metallic huskiness enveloped him in a cloud.

"I've been waiting and waiting for you—saying my prayers. I don't know what I believe in—but every night I've said my prayers. I had to get nearer to you somehow."

"I've said mine too," he answered brokenly, "asking to come back to you—and to be big enough—for this—"

CHAPTER VIII

1

ON receiving his son's letter, Lord Ivonrood came up to town by the next express. Prompt action had always been a principle with him. Now it had become an obsession. He knew himself to be engaged in a race against an implacable and unrelenting enemy.

This time Berkeley Square was ready. He disliked the tall sober-faced house because it had no associations for him. The Setons had been country people who, when they came to London for their yearly orgy, did so in a Nomadic fashion, never taking root. Nevertheless Seton House, which had only been in the family for a generation, was typical of them all. For the most part it contained things solid, time tested and solemnly splendid, but also there were flashes like the suddenly revealed complexes of an apparently normal temperament—a splash of colour, an incongruous modern picture flaming out from the sober Mid-Victorian landscapes, or a freakish ornament picked up on Heaven alone knew what secret adventure.

Ivonrood arrived at nine o'clock in the morning. By ten o'clock his son and daughter-in-law had already answered his imperious summons. In spite of her denials, Mrs. Seton had not slept, and it was a shrunken little old woman who sat before the brightly burning fire, staring into it with her vague, meaningless smile. She

looked years older than her husband who, for all his air of rather childish perplexity, was still a robust and vigorous figure.

It was characteristic of all three that for several minutes they said nothing of what was uppermost in their thoughts. The old man now shuffling restlessly backwards and forwards across the sunlit, mellow, shadowed library, now coming to an abrupt standstill as though remembering some resolution to spare himself, spoke of the struggle which he had just left behind him.

"They are as undisciplined among themselves as they are rebellious to outer authority," he said with contempt. "They strike sporadically over everything and nothing, and snap their fingers at their own Trade Unions. They have their own grievances, they say, and every day they have a new one. It would be more tolerable if I had men with backbone to stand behind me. But I have not. My representatives are a poor set, frightened out of their wits, without convictions, drifting about from one side to another. 'Après moi le deluge'—and they are not sure if it would not be wiser to go with the deluge. Even McKay has begun to talk of compromising." He came to one of his periodical stops and stared fixedly at his son. "What do you think of things, Roy?"

Mr. Seton raised his fine eye-brows.

"Upon my word, sir, I sympathise with Mr. McKay, whoever that gentleman may be. I don't know what to think. These enquiries and Commissions are most unsettling to one's convictions. I hope I am a just man. If anything which I have hitherto regarded as lawfully mine should prove to be the cause of suffering—eh—unnecessary suffering or injustice, I should be prepared to make concessions—considerable concessions—I—eh—dislike the idea of suffering. It worries me. The times

are changing, sir. If I could be sure of what was best for the country——”

Ivonrood sighed deeply and resumed his pacing.

“Suffering—injustice! May I ask, is it just that a man’s work should be taken from him and divided among his tools, who are as capable of conceiving it as of flying? And what is all this silly talk about suffering—the inheritance of every man jack of us? I suffer. Here—in this damned brain of mine—there are a score of devils picking away at the grey matter—pulling it down bit by bit. That’s a pretty picture to carry round with one, eh? Why don’t I put a bullet through it all and die decently? Because I recognise that my desires are neither here nor there. I have a duty to perform—and that is to keep what I have created out of the hands of madmen. I’ll give up when I die and not before. But if I could change places with anyone of these down-trodden, over-worked, underpaid shirkers, in five years I’d be their master again.” He was silent for a moment, ruminating some new thought. “What matters is, not suffering, but how we endure suffering and for what cause. Injustice—pooh!—the catchword of the useless and the cowardly——”

“I am sure, sir,” said Mr. Seton formally, “that we all admire the fight that you are putting up.”

“The happiness of us all is the only thing that matters,” Mrs. Seton murmured out of her dreams.

Lord Ivonrood smiled cruelly at her.

“Your religion makes you talk like a fool, my dear Ann,” he remarked. Then the delicate flush that crept into her cheeks seeming to irritate him beyond endurance, he exploded suddenly. “And now to crown everything this damned, resurrected grocer’s son. Well, what is it? Let me hear the worst. Does he drop his ‘h’s’?

Does he eat his peas with his knife? Don't spare me, I beg of you."

"I have not seen him eat peas," Mr. Seton answered with perfect gravity. "He drops his 'h's' occasionally. In appearance he is reasonably presentable. Of course, we have only seen him in uniform."

"A vulgar young cockney, eh?"

Mrs. Seton lifted her dim eyes from the fire.

"I should not call him vulgar. I have never heard him say or do anything that is vulgar. I think he tries to be gentle and considerate—to do nothing that might hurt us. But he does not belong to our world. And he is shy and awkward."

"Shyness is not a quality I should have expected from him," Ivonrood interrupted with an angry chuckle. "A counter-jumper who manages to jump from Peckham to Mayfair at one bound is not lacking in audacity. 'Uncouth' is probably a description nearer the mark."

Mrs. Seton remained silent, as though for the moment she had done as much as lay in her power. But it was to her Ivonrood addressed his question. "And what, exactly, are Major Brodie's ideas concerning the future?" he asked.

Mr. Seton answered.

"Upon my word, sir, I don't know. I understand that he is looking for what he calls his 'job.' He goes out every day in search of it, but what he hopes or intends I can't tell you."

"And his qualifications?"

"Heaven knows. I presume he made a good soldier. Before the war he was intended—of course—for his—eh—father's business."

Ivonrood interrupted impatiently.

"Well, without setting eyes on the fellow I can tell

you more than you have told me. Major Brodie will continue to live in your house as long as he considers decent. Then he will come to one or other of us and we shall have to create an occupation for him with a salary that will keep Ursula in comfort. He will have no false shame about it. Being one of these brave fellows who defended our hearths and women from the wicked enemy he considers that for the rest of his natural life it will be our happy duty to provide for him. He comes of a class who looks on things in that way."

Mrs. Seton's delicate hands played nervously on the arm of her chair.

"We must try to be just, father. I'm sure he did not marry Ursula for her position. I don't think he realised it. He is living with us at present because it is our wish—" She drew herself up a little, with the dignity of a proud temperament confronted by something painful and difficult. "Indeed he made a strange condition to his staying. I did not tell you before, Roy, because I was certain it would annoy you, and the position was difficult enough. But, in a way, it is only fair to him that you should know. It was on the second night, and we happened to be together, Ursula, Major Brodie and myself. He insisted that either Ursula should come away with him—or—or—that he should pay—pay his way, as he expressed it, for his wife and himself—"

"Good God!" Mr. Seton turned, helpless with indignation, to his father, but Lord Ivonrood merely hunched his narrow shoulders. "Good God—and what did Ursula say?"

"Nothing. She seemed to agree. But I don't know. You remember how she hid her anxiety from us all those months. She is so terribly, terribly strong."

"At least I hope you made the position clear to him, Ann."

Mrs. Seton's eyes dropped.

"I consented," she said. "I had no choice. I think he can be very obstinate. And I don't want Ursula to leave us—yet."

Lord Ivonrood came to a halt by the window, and stood there gazing onto the green square beneath, with his colourless brows knit in a wry grimace. His sardonic anger had dropped suddenly. In the long ray of sunlight that slanted down upon him from between the heavy curtains, he looked delicate and transparent as a daylight wraith.

"You mean that Ursula is going to be unhappy?" he said, at last.

But Mrs. Seton turned to him with a gesture of almost passionate protest.

"No, no—no—no. Ursula will be happy. Of course, she must be happy. There is too much sorrow everywhere. If Ursula were to be like the rest—it would be unbearable. Only—in this period of transition—of adjustment—one must be near her—to help her. That is all I meant. He is a good man and loves her. I am sure of that."

"She will be unhappy," Ivonrood said relentlessly. "I know Ursula better than the whole pack of you. She may lose her balance and tumble into the bog but she will never be content to live there. Sooner or later, when she realises what she has done, she will try to struggle out and then—and then——" With a startling unexpectedness his judicial attitude broke down. He began to tremble violently. "Oh, damn that fool, Monteith—damn that infernal war—everything going—everything that I cared about." He came swaying across

the room, his fists clenched, his face twisted into a childish unnatural grief. "And to be like this—not a soul to turn to—mouldering—rotting—helpless——"

"My dear father——"

With her husband's exclamation of alarm Mrs. Seton had risen involuntarily to her feet. To both of them it seemed that death was quite close—that it was impossible that anything so frail could live through such a storm. But in a moment Ivonrood had recovered himself. It was as though a vice had descended upon the senile hysteria, crushing it out of sight. He shook off his son's support and, half leaning against the mantelpiece, brushed the perspiration from his face with a white silk handkerchief.

"Now for heaven's sake don't fuss—it's nothing. I'm over tired. These night journeys don't suit me. But you'd better go now. I only sent for you to find how things stand. But you don't know. I have Ursula and this Brodie coming to lunch. I shall find out for myself." He caught the exchanged glance and smiled slyly. He was quite calm now and rather malicious. "You have no need to be alarmed. It will be some months before I begin to say things I don't mean. I shall handle the situation with tact. Afterwards I shall see what must be done—for Ursula and the future."

2

On their way to Berkeley Square Ursula and Adam visited the Times Book Club. They spent an hour there. To the observant salesman there was something charming in this vivid young woman's enthusiasm. And she bought recklessly. All her favourites—old and new—were on her list. Wells, Beresford, Walpole, Sinclair, Galsworthy—and then a sudden leap into the past which

taxed the library beyond its resources—"Wuthering Heights" and "Bleak House"—and a sprinkling of modern poetry from Mrs. Meynell to the galaxy of war poets. The flush of a lover's intoxication deepened in her cheeks as one name after another came to her memory; but once, unmistakably, her companion yawned. Though she did not see him yawn some hint of weariness reached her, for she turned and laid her hand on his arm, looking at him with shining serious eyes.

"It's my wedding present. You're sure you'll like them, Adam?"

"Of course I will. I was always mad on reading. Though it wasn't this sort of stuff."

He picked up her last choice—"God's Counterpoint"—and turned over the leaves. What was "Counterpoint"? He had no idea. Anyhow this chap Beresford had a lot to say about it.

Adam Brodie yawned again, turning his head.

He was not really tired nor even bored. But the towering wall of books on either hand confused him like a crowd of strangers. Not a single name among them was familiar. And some of them had an aloof inaccessible air. So that his apparent weariness was also a vague resentment and distrust which, had he recognized, he would have suppressed furiously as detestable and ungrateful.

For, after all, she loved these strangers, and each fresh gift was just another proof of her great love for him.

Afterwards they walked through the Park together and Ursula talked eagerly and not very coherently of the books that she had bought. Her own incoherence troubled her. She did not know that it is not easy to talk of Wells and Bennett and Mrs. Meynell to a man

brought up on the adventures of Dick Turpin and the heroes of the Heartsease Library.

And Brodie's comments were monosyllabic and jarred on his own ears. He caught himself trying to think out variations of his own futilities.

Nor is it easy to talk intelligently of things of which one has never heard.

A horseman rode past them at a canter and Ursula bowed and he saluted gayly, without a glance at the man beside her. But Brodie recognised him.

"If I lived to be a hundred," he said wistfully, "I'd never sit a horse like that."

"Esmé has ridden all his life," Ursula answered.

After that they walked on in silence. Without knowing it, both were seeking for something that would restore the perfect balance of their happiness. All at once Ursula laughed.

"Do you remember that rosy cheeked nurse?" she asked. "That one that was so in love with you, Adam?" And he laughed back.

"Rather. She was a real sport though. They were all real sports."

"Yes, she played up that night——"

So that when they came to Berkeley Square they were talking easily and happily of the time on which their common life was founded. And the shadow between them had never really been.

3

For the first few minutes Brodie wondered why he had dreaded this interview. This old man was so very old—so very feeble—and he had a gentle courteous manner that was almost appealing. It was as though he said:

"You must be indulgent with me, you young people."

He set Brodie with his face to the light and questioned him as to his escape. He himself sat in the shadow, huddled in a deep chair, his finger tips pressed together, nodding a slow appreciation. He did not laugh as the others had done.

So that it was not Lord Ivonrood who made Brodie's story halting and colourless. It was rather Ursula. He did not look at her, but he knew that she was listening as though she heard him for the first time, watching him with her loving, pitiless eyes. Her pride in him was a spur that goaded him into grotesque effort.

"So the old party had the laugh on me," he said.

Lord Ivonrood sat forward a little.

"You have had a wonderful career, Major—a wonderful career."

And now Brodie, accustomed to the light, saw the face opposite him clearly. It was extraordinary that he should have thought it merely old and harmless. Its shrewd malice was unmistakable.

He gave an awkward laugh.

"Oh, I don't know so much about that, sir. My career hasn't begun yet."

"So that you don't intend to remain in the army?"

"No, that's not my job."

"You are quite right, Major. The moment peace is signed a soldier becomes an anachronism. An unwelcome anachronism. It is essential that the people should forget a war as soon as possible so that they shall be ready to fight in the next. A soldier with wound stripes is a reminder. But I see you are still in uniform?"

"I'm on leave, sir, waiting demobilisation. It might come any time now. You see, sir, my case is peculiar."

"Quite so—quite. And then——? You must for-

give me, Major, if I seem inquisitive, but you will agree that since my granddaughter is involved I have a certain right. I am an old man. I want to see a little into the future in which I may have no share."

Suddenly Brodie saw himself sitting there with his hands spread over his knees. He shifted his position, stemming his fist on his thigh in a stiff attitude of ease. He saw Ivonrood's eyes following him with their colourless smile.

"I can't tell you much, sir. I don't know myself yet. I'm looking for something that'll give me a chance. I know how to handle men. There ought to be something for me somewhere."

"I don't want to discourage you, Major. But you know—experts are required everywhere nowadays."

"I shall find something," Brodie said patiently.

Ivonrood leant forward a little, his fingers interlaced. His manner had become graver and less subtle.

"In your case, however, there is no need for anxiety. As you know, Ursula is my heir. It is improbable that I shall live more than a year or two. In the meantime she will have an allowance that will keep you in the position to which she is accustomed. Should children come to you, under certain probable circumstances, your eldest son will take my title. I have arranged for that."

"That's—as—as my wife wishes," Brodie stammered. The perspiration had gathered under his fair hair. He felt humiliated and sick at heart, as though he had been ruthlessly stripped naked. He hardly dared to glance at Ursula, but when he did so he found her eyes resting on him with an untroubled gravity. And it came to him with the shock of a discovery—these people were different. They thought of things—spoke of things differently. And Ursula was one of them.

He looked away from her again, choosing his words with a painful effort. "That's as it should be, my Lord. I come of—of plain people. Not but what we 'ave a sort of ambition too. But I want to do what's right by everybody. I wouldn't stand in the way——"

"I was sure of that, Major."

"And anyhow, when the time comes, it'll be for—for them to choose," Brodie stumbled on, tearing the remnants of his shame from him. "It's up to me to make them proud enough."

He heard Ursula's quick laugh.

"How like men to get deadly serious about things that don't exist," she said, "and that may never exist."

"I've got to get my job first," Brodie muttered.

Ivonrood gazed placidly into the fire.

"Is it necessary?"

"I shan't live on your money, sir."

"Pooh, my dear Major, that's like a penny novelette."

"Maybe," Brodie assented. He knew that it was, because he had read much the same sentence over and over again—so often indeed that it had become a part of him. "It's true all the same, sir."

"Still there is no need for you to hunt through England for what you call your job. It doesn't suit my taste that you should do so. It would be easy for me or some of my friends to find a suitable post for you."

"Thanks, your Lordship. But I've got to find it for myself."

Ivonrood waited a moment. Then he smiled puckerishly at Ursula.

"You have chosen a very determined mate, my dear. Perhaps he will change his mind. I shall not change mine. In the meantime lunch is waiting for us. Will you give an old man your arm, Major?"

But Brodie stood up stockishly. He did not know that Ivonrood had never asked for support in his life and that the request was something in the nature of a conciliatory gesture. He did know that he had made a mess of things—that in some incomprehensible way his very feelings had made him ridiculous. At any rate there was escape open to him.

"I'm sorry, my Lord, but I've got to see my old Colonel. He's promised to help me. I only brought Ursula here—and—and to meet you, sir."

"That was very kind of you." Ivonrood peered up maliciously under his pale eyebrows. "I think you find it difficult to accept hospitality, Major."

Ursula was not looking at her husband now. Had she done so she would have caught a flash of the man she had been waiting for. The blue eyes, with their queerly mingled expression of diffidence and purpose had become wholly confident.

"I can't afford hospitality yet, your Lordship."

He kissed Ursula when he left. They always did so, as though the fear of separation still haunted them. But he knew afterwards that she had not expected it. She kissed him back too eagerly, making his act her own.

4

Brodie met his Colonel at a little old-fashioned English eating-house off the Strand, and the two men set themselves solemnly down to order the kind of meal that they had talked of, on and off, for four years, and in which steak, apple-tart, and a glass of the house's most precious port played the leading rôles.

Colonel Arnold Murray was thirty years of age and

of markedly delicate appearance. His pale face bore the traces of great suffering and of unforgettable experience, but suffering and experience alike had only intensified the man's natural gentleness. Neither in physique nor in character was he a born soldier, and the three starred D.S.O. ribbon and the Mons medal and the three wound stripes—one for each star—revealed once again that it is only a dreamer who can be consistently great in action.

He had had the unusual experience of serving throughout the war in one regiment whose officers on two occasions had been wiped out either by wounds or death. In that regiment Brodie had enlisted as private, and between the two men there was a steel bond, not so much of affection, for they had never become intimate, but of respect and memory.

It was typical of both men that in their conversation old days were left untouched. Even Brodie's own personal adventures were passed over casually. They talked of London and of the changes they found and of the comrades already drifting to the four corners of the earth. It was only towards the end of the meal that they came to what was really uppermost in their minds.

"So it's the last few days of khaki for us," Murray said. "I'm just waiting for my papers and I suppose you'll be turned loose soon. What will it feel like, I wonder?"

"Any number of fellows are trying to stay on—working for the R.A.F. and so on. But it's a sort of *pis-aller* I fancy. And I couldn't do it anyhow. I'm no soldier."

"Nor I."

"And yet we've been at it for years—four precious years. If we were old or very young they wouldn't mat-

ter so much. But for men like ourselves it's going to be pretty bad."

"I don't know where to turn," Brodie said. He had not meant to say it—had not even been conscious of thinking it. But now he saw with a secret consternation that it was true. He went on headlong. "You know what I am—what I was, anyhow. My father's got a little shop in Peckham. I used to sell tea and sugar. Never thought of doing anything else. Well—I can't go back. That's all there is to it. But I'm not any different either. Not in that way. People ask me, 'What have you done?' And I tell them. And they say, 'Oh, yes, but before that?' And I tell them—well—and they think, if they don't say it, 'That's all you're good for.' All the same I can't go back. Tea and sugar—they're useful things, but I've gone on somewhere—I don't know where."

"That's the rub," Murray said. "If we only knew—but one doesn't."

Brodie smiled at him wryly.

"You know, anyhow."

"I don't. I thought I did, but I don't." He hesitated a moment, twisting his wine-glass stem between his slender fingers. "I'm awfully sorry, Brodie, you know, I had hoped to be of some use to you. My father's factories had grown so enormously since the war and I was certain of a junior partnership. Knowing you as I do I wanted you in with me. You can handle men—and that's what's needed. It was all settled as far as I was concerned. But circumstances have changed. My father was extraordinarily generous—and frank. We went into things together—and then—well, we had a row. My fault, chiefly, I daresay. My nerves are rotten. I said things—I lost my head and my temper and

everything with them. The fact is—in a month or two I shall be on the rocks myself.” His hand had begun to tremble and he moved his head restlessly, looking about him in the effort to appear self-controlled. “My God, Brodie, why are people so queer?” he broke out with subdued excitement. “What’s the matter with them? My father’s the best father in the world—devoted to me—and he let me go to the war without a flinch. He wanted to go too. He did honestly. And when they wouldn’t have him he nearly killed himself on special duty during the raids and did one or two plucky things, they tell me. He loved his country like that—and yet——” He stopped again, staring in front of him with haggard eyes. “I oughtn’t to say anything—but I’ve been brooding over it all—and I tell you my nerves are all to bits—I don’t seem able to control myself.”

Brodie appeared intent on something at the far end of the dismal room.

“It’s all right,” he said. “I can sort of understand. Anyhow, we all seem to be in the soup in our different ways.”

“But what’s the matter with people?”

“It’s easy dying for things,” Brodie said slowly. “It’s living for them that tells. It brings out the yellow streaks.”

Murray made a movement of utter weariness.

“Anyhow, I’ve cleared out,” he said. “I said what I thought and it was ugly enough—I’ve got to start again. I’ve been brought up to nothing, and nobody wants *ci-devant* colonels. Even if they did—why, if anyone was to fire a gun in this room I’d bolt like a hare.”

He began to laugh noiselessly to himself.

“I’m awfully sorry,” Brodie said.

For the moment the half-revealed tragedy had eclipsed his own trouble. He had forgotten how much legitimate hope he had set on this man who knew him, and all that he was capable of doing. Now he saw before him the grey continuation of a search whose bitterness and futility he had already tasted—the morning start on foredoomed enterprises, the seizing of threads that either snapped or led into blind alleys, the helpless drifting with the indifferent multitude—jostled by them, having no place. Then at night the return to the big subdued house, showing a brave front, even to himself, lest for a moment doubt should slip in.

"They wanted us to be big," he said gropingly, "and we did our best to be big—and now it's all over they've only got little jobs for us."

Murray nodded.

"I know," he said. "We've either grown too much for our place or we've used up the little bit of decency and courage we had, so that we can't even do what we were born to. The first half of us will clear out if we can and the rest will try and bring down the whole edifice in ruins so that nobody shall see what rotters they are at heart. In which case there's an end to old England." He took a letter from his pocket and handed it across. "I have just had this from a man I know," he said abruptly. "He was a Rhodes Scholar up at the same time I was and now he's the owner of a big ranch in California. When he heard how things were, he wrote. He wants me to come out."

Brodie read in silence.

"It sounds all right," he said at last with an effort. "Settles your difficulty in a way."

"In a way, yes. But what I wanted to get at was this—I think I could get you into it too. Van Eck's a

fine fellow, as I remember him, and you see what he says—there's room over there for full-sized folks. What's in a man he can do. It won't matter whether you sold sugar or brass tacks. If anything it'll be to your credit. God's own country, you know—and all that."

But Brodie sat very still, staring down at the letter which he no longer saw. Not till now, when the gate stood open, had he known how badly he wanted to escape. The thought that it lay in his power never to go back to the big house and these quiet impenetrable people whose very language he could not speak was like an intoxication. His thwarted, unwanted energy bubbled up laughing and exultant in him. He saw himself in wide, free places. He knew how men lived out there because he had seen them on the film, with a revolver on the hip and their lives and fortunes in their hands. Ursula would be there. She too was "full-sized," as Van Eck had written. She had been tried out. And in the end, at any rate, she would be glad because she would see him as he was and the intangible something between them would be gone.

But then the intoxication receded and left him high and dry in the musty, frowsty dining room. Most of the diners had gone and it was very quiet. But beyond the quiet was the ceaseless familiar rumble of the streets. It was like the unlovely voice of someone dearly loved.

"It may be God's own country," Brodie said, "but if it isn't mine——" He sat up straight, struggling painfully for his thought. "If we clear out now—then what's it all been about? What did we make all that fuss for—why didn't we just let the Germans 'ave it?"

Arnold Murray took back the letter. He was smil-

ing, and the look of strain had gone from his white over-sensitive face.

"I wondered what you'd say," he said. "Personally, though, I don't know what earthly good I am anywhere. I've made up my mind. I've refused. But I told Van Eck that I had a friend who might be useful to him. I gave him your name."

"It's jolly decent of you," Brodie said.

They were silenced by a sudden embarrassment, but afterwards, on the pavement, just before a good-bye which they knew to be final, Brodie reverted to the offer. "It's jolly decent of you," he said again, "but I think I'll stick it."

5

For an hour at least he enjoyed the serenity of a man who has burnt his boats. But when he turned his back on that spectacular conflagration his heart sank.

He wanted Ursula. In the worst days of his captivity and escape he had not been driven by a greater need of her. But now, deliberately he was keeping away. For one thing, he had talked too much of Arnold Murray. The knowledge that he had a friendly and powerful influence in the background had given him an assurance that amounted to cocksureness. How was he to explain now that he had not bragged—but that things had gone wrong again, that the only offer made to him had been unacceptable? Even the reason for his refusal, though it was as rooted in him as a stubborn instinct, was becoming blurred. He knew, with a sick feeling of helplessness, that he would never be able to explain.

Then he had rushes of self-assertiveness which urged him to go back, and, ruthlessly trampling everything under foot, carry Ursula away with him—anywhere where

they could start afresh in the perfect intimacy of those first days. But the impulse was never strong enough. At its height it could not face the subtle authority that lived in the big house and in these quiet people.

In the reaction he turned bitterly against the Setons.

What had they got to be so superior about anyhow? What right had they to look down on him? He was as good as any of their sort. Which of them, in the circumstances, would have made good as he had done? Not one. They were just stuck fast in their traditions. As though the war hadn't knocked all that stuff on the head. The only people who mattered were the people who proved what they were made of.

But his resentment was no relief to him because it was unjust. In his heart he knew that the Setons were neither arrogant nor super-critical. They had accepted him as one of themselves unflinchingly. They were pathetically anxious to smooth over the rough places. Even Margaret, with her enigmatic reserve, had gone out of her way to show him goodwill.

Still he could not bring himself to go back. He wandered aimlessly through the streets until dusk, brooding, planning, wrestling with the tangible and intangible difficulties of his new life. He wore himself out at last, and going into a hotel ordered the stiffest pick-me-up he knew the name of. The Brodies were grim teetotalers and he had held fast to the family abstemiousness with his own peculiar obstinacy. But now he did not belong to the family any more. He had to make his own laws.

He disliked the stuff. In spite of himself he was ashamed and self-conscious, as he had been when he had smoked his first cigarette and his mother had become an omnipresent figure of Justice. He slunk out of the

place at last like a criminal. Nevertheless he had regained his balance. Colour flowed into his outlook in a warm tide. Life took on its old glamour. The love of Ursula and Adam Brodie was again, in the darkness of the summer night, a superb force which made the day's jarring obstacles ridiculous. Even his vague grievances against his wife's people passed into remorse and tenderness. After all, it was his fault. He was shy and clumsy and distrustful. He didn't make friends with them. He gave them no chance. If he was one of them—well, he was one of them. He had to behave as one of them, sharing his troubles openly and frankly.

And now he was feverishly anxious to get home. He had wandered far into the city and, ill as he could afford it, he bribed a taxi man to drive him back at top speed. He enjoyed the magnificence of his tip. It was like a gesture from his new freedom.

He went spur-jingling across the dim hall. He had never quite lost a boyish pleasure in his spurs. Their ring had a gallant, knightly sound.

It occurred to him now that he would take everybody to the theatre—do the thing in style—a regular splash in which he would show them that after all he was a man of the world. In the general warmth and glow of things it would be easier to make a fresh start with them.

But the library was in darkness and apparently deserted. It was only after a moment of hesitation that he saw Mrs. Seton in her chair by the fireside. She had been reading, for the book was still on her knees, but since the dusk at any rate she had sat there idle—perhaps asleep.

Brodie drew near cautiously. People asleep awed him. And something in that small grey-clad figure moved

him to great gentleness. But when he came opposite her he saw that her eyes were wide, and fixed blankly on the firelight.

"Mrs. Seton——"

She stared violently and looked up at him, and for one moment he saw her stripped of her frustrated, killing grief—young, radiantly happy. But the look passed almost before he had realised it. She seemed to wither like a delicate flower exposed to a sudden blasting heat.

"I—I did not see you come in," she faltered, "and I thought——" She broke off, drawing herself up with a poignant affectation of strength. "Ursula is out, Major," she said. "You know you were both invited to-night, and as you did not come Ursula had to go without you."

He had forgotten. But he was not to be daunted.

"It went clean out of my mind. Did it matter much?"

"I don't think so. She will be able to explain that you had business. But she had to go. You see, she has many friends, and friends are a duty as well as a happiness, don't you think?"

"Of course—rather—I'm glad she went."

"Won't you turn the light on?"

"Must we?" he asked. "It's rather jolly like this."

She smiled delicately.

"Yes—perhaps it is."

He stood with his elbow on the mantelshelf, looking down on her bowed head. For the first time he felt at ease and happy with her. The deadly equanimity with which she guarded herself had weakened and she had become vulnerable and approachable. He was full of a protecting pity. He felt that there was a kind of kinship between them because he too had lost someone—

all his people. He had no father nor mother now—as she had no son.

He bent down and took the book from her knee. It was "Raymond." He had heard them talking about it—some stuff by someone who believed you could communicate with the dead.

"You mustn't worry," he said gently. "I shouldn't bother with all that. He's all right, you know."

He was turning over the leaves idly. It was too dark to read, but he did not want to look at her or to make her feel that he was intruding.

"I know he is all right," she said.

"Then you mustn't be so unhappy. I can't bear you to be unhappy and I know you are. You think I'm a thick skinned sort of fellow, but I do get at some things." He sat down opposite her, leaning towards her with his elbows on his knees, flushed with a simple eagerness. "You're not unhappy about me, are you?"

"About you?"

"Oh, well, I thought you might be. You don't know me a bit. I expect it worries you."

"We shall get to know you little by little, Major."

"No—you won't—not as we're going on now—just jabbering about all sorts of stupid things. You're Ursula's mother and we've never as much as had a little talk together."

The same faint smile flickered across her face.

"Shall we talk now?"

"May we? I'd like to talk about myself. I'd like you to know the sort of fellow I am. I think somehow you'd be easier in your mind."

"Tell me just what you would like to tell me."

So he told her everything—just as it came to him.

Sitting there with his square chin on his hand, his eyes on the fire, he showed her the little shop in Peckham, his father and mother and Clara, the apple-barrel, his boyish escapades, the dreams he had dreamed and how "Thomas Brodie and Son" had been painted up for the first time. He drew a laughing picture of himself as a young man, serving wrong measures behind the counter, swaggering about town, and of his first love.

"Of course I didn't really know what love was," he said. "I'd just read about it—and I was always waiting for something wonderful to come——"

He spared her nothing. He had all the self-made man's pride in the humble details of his life. He wanted her to see how well he had done. But when he came to the war he began to stumble.

"My people didn't want me to go," he said. "Mother didn't, anyhow. She's never really forgiven me. Only Clara understood how it was."

"She must have cared a great deal for you."

He laughed at that.

"Oh no, Clara and me, we were just good pals." But the laugh broke. Suddenly, from nowhere, homesickness sprang upon him. He had seen his own pictures too vividly. All the little foolish things came crowding up out of his memory—little kindnesses, little sacrifices, little incoherent efforts to express great love. He had never understood before that they too might be unhappy because of him—even Clara.

"Anyhow they chucked me out," he said bitterly.

Then he looked up at his companion and the whiteness of her face frightened him into self-forgetfulness. "Oh, I say—I've been a brute—jawing your head off like this."

"It doesn't matter. I'm a little tired. It's nothing!"

He got up and came to her, covering her hand with his.

"I didn't mean to—but I just wanted you—well, to have a talk—so that I shouldn't feel so strange—out of things. Look here, I've no one but Ursula and you people—and you've lost your son. If I could be a sort of son to you."

He was too blind with emotion to see the deadly effort of her smile.

"Why, I think you are a—a sort of son, Major Brodie."

"Then don't call me Major—anyhow I shan't be one much longer. Couldn't you call me Adam?"

"Why, of course—Adam."

"Thank you." Moved by a tragic impulse he bent over her and kissed her. "Good night, then—mother."

He felt her shrink away from him. Then the whole glamour and intoxication of the hour faded. He felt her horror like an icy wind.

She had been tolerating him.

After a long silence he turned and groped his way out of the dark room.

CHAPTER IX

1

THAT night Ursula spoke to Esmé Monteith for the first time since her husband's return. He sat opposite her at dinner and she was unreasonably certain that he had arranged to do so in his unobtrusive way and that he had come to a rather dreary festivity for her sake. He smiled across at her and without other explanation, the old understanding was re-established.

She was frankly glad of his presence. The dinner had been given by the Grahams, old friends of the Seton family, in Major Brodie's honour, and the latter's absence had been difficult to explain. The Grahams were people to whom business, at its best, was a rather middle-class preoccupation and at no time an acceptable reason for breaking a private engagement, and they were astonished and mildly offended. Ursula, who was a bad liar and who had small faith in her own excuse, was acutely conscious of the fact. It worried her indeed to an extent that made her realise that something was wrong with her. At least she was becoming oversensitive.

Esmé, with his quiet ready support, soothed her. He made her think of the ideal tennis partner—never poaching yet always ready to take the ball you couldn't reach yourself, graceful and good-humoured, eager, yet not too much in earnest. And as much as she was abnor-

mally aware of the jarring influences around her, she was charmed by his perfect poise and efficiency. Every little movement of his pleased her. Possibly he would never do anything very great, but what he did would be done well, smoothly and without heat. His life, like his personality, would be harmonious. The people who loved him might be deeply unhappy, but their good taste would never be offended.

On his side Monteith was thinking that something had happened to Ursula that made her nearly beautiful. Though he loved her, he had never deceived himself as to the quality of her physical attraction. She had the charm of superb health in a superb body, of a fiery temperament that blazed out in her ruddy hair and passionate grey eyes. But she had been too rough hewn for beauty.

Now something was at work on her that was chiseling down that irregularity and power to a rare fineness. But it gave Esmé Monteith no pleasure.

"Too near the nerve," he thought. "Too near the nerve."

Afterwards, in the drawing room, he came over to her and, having tactfully and unostentatiously driven her companion into retreat, sat down beside her.

"I expect you thought I had gone this time for good," he said, "or was brooding out something Machiavellian. As a matter of fact I was just getting things straight. You know I'm not an impulsive soul, Ursula, I like to know beforehand what I am going to do. I dislike surprising myself. It makes me seem cold-blooded and indifferent. But you know better, don't you?"

"I've worried a great deal about you, Esmé," she answered gravely.

"You shouldn't have done that. All the same, I

want a little talk with you—just a very little one—and there's no chance here and I don't think, somehow, that there will be many chances in the future. May I take you home afterwards?"

"Of course you may."

For so long as he remained with her he talked cheerfully and well of some new Japanese curios that he had picked up. He was something of a connoisseur. He had at any rate an artist's power of making his hearer see beauty as he saw it.

The drive was a short one, and Esmé Monteith, lounging gracefully in his corner of the limousine, began at once.

"It's all very well trying to obviate surprises," he said, "but as long as one is human one will always do the unexpected. You remember the last thing I said to you the last time we were together? I expect you do, because you thought it so incredibly horrible of me. Well, I meant it. In one sense I still mean it. But there is this difference. When I heard that Major Brodie had returned I made the amazing discovery that I really loved you. Margaret told me how frightfully happy you were, and I was frightfully happy myself. I believe I had tears in my eyes. Even now, in cold blood, I want to take your husband by the hand and swear myself his friend——"

His frivolous tone, which might once have misled her, did not mislead her now.

"I wish you would, Esmé. He needs friends—we both do."

"I will then. And you'll know it's sincere. That is what I wanted to tell you. But if you should become unhappy, please remember also that I have retracted nothing. Under these circumstances the friendly ar-

mistice comes automatically to an end. I shall give you no other warning."

She laughed.

"I am not afraid, Esmé."

"Very well, then. Only there must be no question of my not having played fair—"

"There will never be any question at all," she said with a gravity.

He did not answer. He changed the subject, lightly as he had begun it.

2

But two days later he arrived for lunch at the Setons with that air of cheerful haphazardness which disguised his most deliberate actions. It appeared that he had been gazetted Colonel—chiefly on the strength of his survival—as he assured them—and that the event had to be celebrated.

"They're giving 'Tristan' at the opera," he said "and I've got the Royal box or something like it. It will be a glorious opportunity for the war heroes to display themselves to a forgetful country."

He smiled across at Adam Brodie as he spoke, including him definitely and gracefully. And Brodie accepted, for once almost at ease. He wanted to accept. This man who was so unlike himself had an obscure, half painful fascination for him. He wanted to be with him and watch him and talk with him. He kept on trying to bring the conversation back to the engagements in which they had both fought. He hardly knew why. Perhaps it was to remind these others of what he had done—to appear again in Ursula's eyes as the soldier and man of action who had voluntarily offered up his life. It did not dawn on him that the subject

was unwelcome and that for some subtle reason of theirs they had finished with it finally. Even when he forced it upon them time and again they spoke of it in a different language. In Esmé Monteith's attitude towards the war there was the deliberate matter-of-factness of the professional soldier who has done his duty and can look back upon the whole event with a critical detachment. But always Brodie was personal, highly coloured, profoundly moved even in recollection. It was impossible to forget that he had fought in a Great Cause.

Still, they knew each other's merits. They had at least one tradition in common and of that tradition Brodie talked incessantly, growing in his eagerness a little pompous and a little tiresome. And they listened, Monteith with his air of courteous attentiveness.

But in the end the conversation drifted away from him. It turned to the reviving social life of the country, and to the industrial unrest and the great aerial exploits, pointing to an unweakened national character, to the opera and the war that was being waged against enemy composers.

Monteith characterized the crusade as the most puerile of all puerile forms of patriotism.

"We don't want anything German," Brodie said.

The discussion died there. It was as though he had laid his fingers exactly on a discord. He had voiced his class as they had voiced theirs.

Brodie knew that Monteith loved his wife. He could not have told when the certainty came to him, but it seemed to him that he had known on the day that he had first seen them riding together. A great emotion has sometimes just as much amazing simplicity and directness of vision.

That night his knowledge occupied his whole mental

horizon. He sat in the extreme corner of the box nearest the stage with Margaret next to him, and beyond her again Monteith and Ursula. Margaret seemed bored and ill-at-ease but the other two were motionless and silent, lost in something bigger than themselves. They did not once look at one another, but Brodie, in his state of raw sensitiveness, knew that they were united in an understanding that was outside his experience.

He was left behind—shut out.

For the first act he was resentful and contemptuous. What was it they enjoyed? These fat people waving their arms—all this banging and shrieking? Did they call it music? Why, it was just noise! He wanted to make fun of it—he wished he could tell them how stupid he thought it all.

But in the second act a kind of sorrowful resignation crept over him. He felt as he had done once in a great French cathedral. Though it was beyond his powers of realization he at least knew that this was a superb and wonderful thing. It had depths and heights which left him with a sense of forlorn helplessness, but he at least knew that they were there. This was love—perhaps love as Adam Brodie knew love—but sung in a language that he had never learnt. He tried to lay hold of it, to catch familiar accents, the refrains which to him meant music. But it was like reaching for the stars—like throwing oneself against an immense, invisible wall.

He grew tired with effort. He began to fidget, looking down at the spectral audience and then inevitably and wistfully at Ursula. As he saw her she was a subdued fire, glowing in the dusk. The dark, slender man beside her threw her warmth and vividness into relief. He sat back a little, his arms folded, apparently uncon-

scious of her. But Adam Brodie knew what was behind that indifference. He knew without bitterness or distrust. There was indeed, in his attitude towards Monteith a humility that was simple and ingenuous. It was wonderful that Ursula should not have loved and married him. But instead she had loved and married him, Adam Brodie, and on the miraculousness of that love he built his faith. He had no claim to her. There was nothing in him, he saw that now, which justified her love.

Simply—she loved him.

With the entry of King Mark the spell broke for Ursula. She stirred a little, and because she was splendidly happy and satisfied she turned, smiling, towards her husband.

He was asleep. His head rested against the partition and one hand lay, half clenched, on the velvet ramp. It was broad and powerful and yet oddly helpless looking, like the outstretched hand of a tired and baffled boy. In the dim light from the stage she saw her husband's face. And it was stamped with the same distressed weariness.

Towards the close of the act Monteith moved his chair back sharply and Ursula warmed towards him in gratitude. That was like Esmé—like a generous sportsman.

The noise had the effect that she knew he had intended. Just before the curtain fell, Adam Brodie woke up. He looked around him with a dazed, apologetic smile.

"It seems a bit long, doesn't it?" he said.

3

A supper party with other friends at Monteith's chambers was to complete the evening, but in the vesti-

bule Margaret complained petulantly of headache and it was arranged that Brodie should see her home and return later. He himself was dead tired and glad of the respite.

As the car crept out of the maze of after-theatre traffic, he was thinking very little of his companion, who sat white and silent in her corner. But suddenly she turned towards him.

"You ought not to have let yourself fall asleep like that," she said. "It may be only a little thing, but it annoyed Ursula and made her ashamed. If you mean to keep her, you've got to feed her pride in you. It's all she really cares for——"

The attack had the brutality and directness of a blow in the face. He did not answer and she went on in a changed voice. "I'm sorry for you—because I like you, even though you don't belong to us and never will. You're out of your depths and you've got to sink or swim. And I'm afraid you're not much of a swimmer, poor Adam."

She laughed a little and then, to his amazement, her hand caught his and held it for a moment in a hard, cold clasp as enigmatic as herself.

CHAPTER X

1

ADAM BRODIE accepted no more invitations. Abruptly and almost without explanation he stood clear of the social wheel which was beginning to whirl faster and faster, carrying the Seton family with it.

"That sort of thing's not my style," he said.

Their appeals to his sense of fitness, their quiet references to the impropriety of allowing his wife to be seen at one function after another alone, remained without result. For the first time they struck that element in his make-up which Mrs. Brodie would have characterised as "mulish."

Ursula least of all understood the change in him. His air of apologetic diffidence had troubled her, but this sullen taciturnity made her definitely unhappy. For all her loyalty to him he appeared to her in those terrible moments, when the intelligence forces the heart to view its idol in cold daylight, as a beaten man who does not know how to take his beating. Though he no longer told her so, she knew that his daily search for a first-class opening for a man who had no other qualifications than the power of dealing out sugar and leading other men on forlorn hopes, ended consistently in failure. That, she told herself, meant nothing to her. It was natural enough. But that he should show failure—a resentful face—filled her with distress and doubt. He

gave her no key to his mood—had no longer the power to do so—and it would never have occurred to her that he was reacting to a deliberate and clever blow.

It did occur to her sometimes that after all she hardly knew him.

These were only interludes—detestable moments following on their most exalted hours of happiness when they came together in the memory of a common danger and a common duty. But they were interludes that became more frequent—that spread like a sore. In them the past tasted stale and arid. They would walk side by side in the painful silence of those who have both too much and too little to say to one another.

So Ursula drifted back into her own world alone.

Her world was not Margaret's world. It consisted of sane and decent people, but sane and decent people who had been cast suddenly adrift. For five years they had endured, fought and worked, and now nothing was expected of them. Their days, which in the past had seemed pleasant enough, were now long stretches which had to be filled at all costs. From tentative pleasure seeking they passed inevitably into a tarantella, and Ursula danced with them. When she stopped to think she remembered the grave purposes with which she had entered her married life. At first she was remorse-stricken, but later they appeared to her as slightly high flown and ridiculous.

Society accepted the situation tactfully. Ursula, who was without malice, escaped malice. It was understood that Major Brodie, on account of his old wound or on account of his military duties, was unable to accompany his wife. The excuse hardly mattered. It was accepted. The whisper "a tragic *mésalliance*" passed presently into charitable silence.

And there were intolerable moments again at these dinner parties, at these dances and race meetings, when she knew that she was glad to be alone. It was as though a relentless force compelled her to face the fact that there had been times, just when she had loved Adam Brodie most, when she had grown hot with pity for him.

Into this scene of slow disintegration Ivonrood appeared fitfully like a restless spirit, itself haunted. Things in Black Valley had reached a deadlock, so that his visits were of short duration, but in them he made a point of meeting Brodie. His manner towards the younger man was at first suavely ironical. It became malicious and often brutal, as though he could no longer control a steadily rising hatred.

"Well, and what industry is competing for you now, Major?"

Brodie met him with a flash of dogged humour.

"I'm waiting till they've fought it out between them, sir."

But a week later he gave an unexpected answer. "I have practically decided. In a few days I hope to be able to tell you finally. I think, sir, you will be satisfied."

It was his first intimation that he had been following some definite object. He turned to Ursula as he spoke, but her eager curiosity was silenced by a stolid reticence. "It's no use my saying anything till I know."

He carried himself confidently again, like a man against whom no reproach can be brought, but his expression was not without its bitterness.

Since the night of the opera Margaret had scarcely spoken to him. She went her way, apart from her own family, having her own pleasures and her own friends. And yet, Brodie was never with her but he knew that

she was watching him. He would look up suddenly and meet her faint, unsolvable smile, and she would hold his gaze deliberately until she forced upon him a kind of understanding. He did not know what the understanding was. It was something disquieting. He began to feel her presence like a play of electricity upon his nerves.

He had one friend in the Seton family whose friendship was neither mysterious nor a thing of formal courtesy. Mrs. Seton had been aghast at herself, and with one of those lightning conversions to which spiritually minded people are given, she swung round from dislike and misjudgment to an almost painful knowledge of the man she had hurt. She understood his weakness and his strength, his exquisite sensibility and his blundering obtuseness. She tried ceaselessly to shield him from the results of both. In a hundred ways, by little kindnesses, by timid acts of affection and trust, she sought to atone to him. And because of his gratitude, because she knew that, through her own act, she would be "Mrs. Seton" to him always, her remorse passed insensibly into the very feeling which he had sought in vain from her.

It was a pathetic friendship because Brodie never really understood.

2

"If you want to see your fellow-victim and forgetful protégé you will find him at the Langham Hospital waiting to be discharged," the doctor wrote. "He's as sane as most people, which isn't saying much these days. I daresay he won't know you from Adam. But I promised, and having found you among the great ones of the land I am delighted to take this opportunity of renewing our acquaintance. I am trying to resurrect a

defunct practice in Wimpole Street and if you introduce me to a few duchesses in an advanced stage of hypochondria I shall be eternally grateful."

Brodie showed the letter to Ursula and they laughed together over it.

"It is Powys, the chap I escaped with," Brodie said. "He'd gone right out of my mind, but it would be great to have a talk with him. I don't believe he's forgotten. One doesn't forget the sort of time we had together."

"When you go I want to come with you," Ursula said.

"I'll have to go at once if I mean to catch him. And you've got engagements."

"I can break them. I want to go. I have a right to meet this Mr. Powys and find out if the German lady was quite so old and ugly as you make out, Adam."

She took his hand in hers and held it with a half-teasing, half-real possessiveness that sent a hot wave of pleasure to the roots of his fair hair.

"I'd like him to tell you all about it," he said wistfully.

That was one of their happiest days together. Ursula threw over a serious bridge party with a light-hearted recklessness that had to be lived up to. They lunched at the Carlton. One of the minor barriers between them had been his caution with regard to money. But now he was eager to be lavish. He picked out the expensive items on the *ménu* simply because they were expensive and without much regard for their mutual compatibility. It was to be a real and splendid celebration.

He did not know quite what he celebrated. The July sunshine was in his blood. He liked the music and the well-dressed people and their incomparable air of breeding. His Puritanical distrust of wealth and luxury was swamped in the sheer joy of life. He belonged to it

all—he was not shut out. And he had, too, a feeling of expectation and confidence as though something that he had been waiting for was to happen at last.

He looked deep and smilingly into his wife's eyes.

"Why are we so happy?" she asked.

"I don't know—I was just wondering. I think old Powys has something to do with it. He reminds me that—oh, well, if one sort of sticks hard enough to a thing it comes right in the end. I stuck it once—I'll be able to stick it again. It sort of cheers me up."

He thought there were tears in her eyes.

"I do love you, Adam," she said simply.

3

The nurse led them briskly down the long cool corridor.

"He'll be going home to-morrow," she said. "His father and sister have come up to fetch him, poor dears. It's been a bad case and even now he's queer tempered. If he doesn't remember you, Major Brodie, better not try to remind him."

Brodie nodded. He felt Ursula rest her hand on his arm for a moment with a comradely understanding of an emotion which he himself hardly understood. What had Powys meant for him, after all? An obstacle, a burden and nearly disaster. He had hated and cursed him. For months the other's moral and physical collapse had barred the way to safety. And yet there was something brotherly and almost tender in his feeling for him.

His last memory of Powys was of a tattered, vermin-ridden bearded scallywag who grovelled in the corner of an evil-smelling loft, whimpering that he wouldn't fight—that he wanted to be left alone to die. There were

other memories going back to the day when they had struck out on the road to freedom together, but in all of them he had been a forlorn helpless figure. He had clung to Brodie from start to finish.

It was difficult to recognize him in this man seated in the arm chair by the open window. It was not merely that he was clean-shaven and neatly dressed. He seemed to have grown bigger. His long, dark face had either developed or regained a look of gloomy power and aggressiveness. It was difficult to think of him crying bitterly, like a child.

Unlike the other patients, he paid no attention to the strangers. A girl, lean and dark as himself, sat on the arm of his chair, and they talked together in an absorbed undertone. The old man opposite them, with his distorted hands gripping his knees, gaped down into the street. Both were poorly clad, but with the pathetic neatness of country people who have brought out their very best. The girl had taken off her hat, and her black hair, drawn sleekly back, showed the outline of a small and graceful head. Seeing the nurse and her companions she fell silent, smiling at them shyly.

"Here are friends for you, Private Powys."

He did not look up immediately. When he did so it was to meet Brodie's eyes without the faintest glimmer of recollection. He got up then, rather slowly and stood at attention.

Brodie's outstretched hand dropped.

"You don't remember me," he said.

The dark face was a mask of respectful emptiness.

"No, sir. I can't say I do. But that's not queer. I'm not right in my mind yet, so they say. I've forgotten things."

He was too respectful. There was something subtly

insolent in his absolute rigidity. It was as though he were apeing a Prussian soldier before his officer.

Brodie, too, remained standing. His light-heartedness had gone. It was as though he had been warned. This link with the past had snapped.

"My name's Brodie," he said, "Major Brodie. We were in rather a tight place together once. But if you've forgotten—well, that's all there is to it."

"Yes, sir. I have forgotten. And I can't say I want to remember. It seems there'll be trouble enough to look forward to."

"When I heard you were here I came at once to look you up," Brodie went on. "I brought my wife with me. I—we wanted to know if there was anything we could do. After all—if you've forgotten, I haven't."

Powys' eyes shifted to Ursula. They inspected her deliberately from head to foot—then suddenly blazed up with uncontrollable and savage satire.

"There's kind it is of you, sir. We've had other fine people coming round here talking like that. We're to be sopped off with charity. They won't give us what belongs to us—not if they can help it."

The girl spoke for the first time. She looked from Ursula to Adam with a good humour that in the gaunt toil-worn young face had an element of the heroic.

"Please not to take any notice of him," she said. "He's not well yet and men get queer notions when they're ill."

"I wasn't thinking of charity," Brodie said. "I came as a sort of comrade. I don't want you to think of me as anything else. You'll be out of the Army in a day or two, so that my being an officer doesn't matter. We can talk straight to one another."

"If we're to talk straight to one another I'll tell you

now there isn't such a thing as comradeship between your sort and my sort," Powys interrupted. "Better let our sort alone."

His sister's gaze had gone back to Ursula, as though fascinated. It dwelt frankly, almost hungrily, on every detail of her dress, but it was without envy or bitterness.

"You see, it's this way," she said. "Father's been having a hard time. They've put him in prison for saying things he ought not to have said, and that's made Tom sore and angry. It's not you special that he's up against, is it Tom? It's just everything."

Powys did not answer. The old man had turned his head sharply, and in a flash of memory Ursula was back on the mountain-side at Ivonrood. Out of the shadow of crumbling walls something furtive and rat-like slipped past her, showing her for one instant this hating, pitiful old face.

She knew that Old Hughie had recognised her too. He dropped his eyes instantly without speaking.

"You come from Black Valley, don't you?" she asked quietly. "I've seen your father up there. I remember him quite well."

"Yes, indeed. I'm cutter in the tin-plate works. And father used to be in the pits till he got hurt. Tom's going again, too, when he's strong enough. Aren't you, Tom?"

"Maybe they'll not have me back," he said.

Ursula answered with a generous eagerness. She wanted to help. There was, too, though she did not recognise it, something feudal, not only in her wish, but in her consciousness that she had a right to help.

"You don't need to be afraid of that," she said. "My grandfather, Lord Ivonrood, would do anything

I wanted. I'll ask him specially to see to it that you have your old place, Mr. Powys. So you mustn't worry."

Brodie, who stood beside her, laid his hand on her shoulder in an involuntary movement of protection. It struck him as queer that she too could blunder, just as he did a dozen times a day. But he could not bear that she should know it and be ashamed and wretched. He wanted to appeal to Powys. "Don't take any notice—she doesn't understand."

But Powys struck ruthlessly and with a kind of joy.

"I'll find work for myself," he said. "It's not for me to be afraid. We don't want help from you or your grandfather. We're going to help ourselves. You'd better make your mind clear on that—the lot of you."

The nurse, who had returned from the further end of the ward, beckoned warningly, and Ursula stood up. She was hurt and bewildered and indignant.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But if that is how you feel there is nothing more to say."

"Not a thing," he agreed satirically.

But the girl nodded and smiled eagerly at them. It was as though she were trying to apologise and explain.

"We do thank you all the same, Ma'am."

"You see, he's queer still," the nurse remarked with professional cheerfulness. "A sort of bee in his bonnet. And a touch of heredity too, I shouldn't wonder."

4

They drove home almost in silence. The brief scene that they had just lived through had left them ashamed and humiliated. It had been ugly. And its ugliness was not a thing outside themselves which they could disown. It was as though the appearance of their lives,

with its decency and order, had been torn and they had been forced to look on a secret deformity.

On their return Ursula went straight to her own room. There was a dance to be prepared for within a few minutes, but she dismissed her maid, too disturbed to bear that person's over-perfect attentiveness.

It was not only the scene with Powys. It was the realisation that in a moment, at the first rough touch, the whole fabric of their happiness had fallen in tatters.

It had been an illusion—a kind of intoxication—a thing of youth and sunshine and good food and rag-time—a pitiful thing.

She had been lying idle, curled up in the big arm-chair outside the circle of light, her eyes closed, given over to a dispirited weariness. But at the familiar knock she caught up a book and began to read. She had no idea what it was she read, but she felt that if she did not fix her mind on something impersonal she might burst out crying.

And she was always ashamed of tears.

Moreover she wanted desperately to hold off a collision that she knew to be inevitable. She was too tired, too bewildered and self-disgusted to face it steadily. If it came now she might be swept off her feet.

Adam Brodie closed the door and walked heavily across the room. Mentally she was watching him. It seemed to her that a loathsome, grinning spirit sat at her elbow, jogging her.

"Look at the way he moves! Is he afraid of breaking something? Why doesn't he walk as though he had a right to be here? But then of course he hasn't. He belongs to his grocer's shop."

She went sick and rigid with shame. She was a traitor, listening to the mean malice of an enemy. She

was so low and treacherous that her love hid its face from her. At least her love must be real enough since it could hurt her unbearably.

"Ursula!"

She heard him but could not answer, so overwhelming was the tumult within her, and he repeated her name in a new note of bitter impatience.

She looked up then and knew instantly that for him at any rate some crisis had been reached. His appearance shocked her like a call for help. He looked demoralised—as though the earth had shaken under his feet and he no longer knew where to find security. He held a letter in his hand, and now he gave it her in silence.

It was a type-written letter on official paper with a badly scrawled signature. It regretted—it went briefly into the unfavourable circumstances.

"What is it, Adam? I don't understand."

"They've chucked me out," he said. "They've turned me down." He made a convulsive effort to control himself. "You see what they say—they want airmen—gunners—sappers—technical chaps—not just damn fighters like me. You can pick them up by the dozen any old time." He jerked his head back with a laugh that jarred on her. "And my God—I thought it was just a matter of making up my mind—of screwing myself up to it—I never had a doubt. They couldn't say I was no good at that—could they? I'd proved it—right up out of the ranks—over the heads of your Oxford and Cambridge chaps—on my own—"

She watched him helplessly. She found herself wondering what this man was doing in her room—so much a stranger could he become to her. He had begun to pace backwards and forwards through the soft light as

though he dared not stand still, and this lack of restraint in someone she had believed brave and cool-headed made it difficult for her to speak patiently.

"Adam—I'm sorry to be so stupid, but I don't understand even now. You didn't want to stay in the Army. You wanted to be demobilised. You said it wasn't your—your place."

"It isn't—it isn't—nothing is." He stopped for an instant, staring at her with the fixity of someone striving desperately to retain a semblance of self-control. "All the same—I applied for a commission in the Regulars."

"When?"

"When I knew I couldn't get a decent job anywhere else."

"Oh, Adam, there was no need. Why are you so impatient? You expect things to drop from heaven. You had only to wait."

"I couldn't wait."

"That's absurd." She went up to him, putting her hands on his shoulders. She was very tender to him because of her secret growing impatience. "Why can't you wait? You've worked and suffered for five years. If anyone has a right to rest you have."

"I've no money," he said suddenly.

"Money?" She had never thought of money. And yet it was grotesquely obvious that she should have thought of it. Distressed as she was at her own short-sightedness his attitude seemed to her exaggerated—almost theatrical. She laughed genuinely. "Oh, Adam, which of us two is the bigger duffer—me for not realising, or you for being so serious? Is that what has been troubling you?"

"I'm cleaned out," he said. "I've had my pay and

my savings. I thought it would be enough till things straightened up. But it wasn't. I didn't realise——"

"—That you had married anyone so recklessly extravagant?" She was smiling at him still, but there was a faint anger in her blood that frightened her. "But, Adam, you must be just. I didn't want you to spend your money on me, and the arrangement that you insisted on went against the family's feeling. They only gave in to please you. But they hated it. It wasn't necessary. We didn't want it—any of us. You know as well as I do that I have money enough."

He pulled her hands violently from his shoulders.

"Do you think I'm going to live on your money?"

"I have lived on yours," she answered steadily.

"Of course you have. You're my wife."

"I haven't ceased to be an individual."

"I am responsible for you."

"I am responsible for myself. I married you because I loved you—not to be supported."

"It is my right and my duty."

"Then we look at things from a different angle."

They were both afraid now. They had struck a rock whose existence neither of them had suspected and in the rebound they were caught by a new current which was sweeping them on faster and faster—whither they dared not think. She made an effort to hold them both back. She conjured up every fine and tender moment in their life together to quiet her surging irritation.

"Adam, we mustn't quarrel, must we? Not about money anyhow. It's absurd and horrible. After all, what does money mean? It's a stupid nothing. It can't come between people who love one another. It doesn't count."

"You can say that," he answered, "because you've

got it." He began pacing backwards and forwards again like a caged and tortured animal. "I know better. There hasn't been an hour in my life—except perhaps when I was fighting—when I haven't known what money means. When I was three years old I knew when things were going wrong in the shop. I used to see father working over the accounts. I've heard him say time and time again, 'If things don't mend we'll have to put up the shutters. It'll be the workhouse for us, Maggie.' They thought I didn't understand—and I didn't—not altogether. But I'd feel as though my blood were freezing. Oh, I know what money means."

The hated tears were in her eyes. They had come with a swift revulsion from anger to pitying understanding.

"I've talked like a mean cad, Adam," she said humbly. "I've only seen things from my point of view. But if you're right, I'm right, too. Money matters, but our happiness matters so much more. We've got to hold on to it, even if our pride—mine and yours—suffers. Our happiness—we've got to think of that."

"Are you happy?" he asked.

He had turned gently to her, but the question was swift and keen as a rapier thrust. She faltered under it, and then rallied, bravely and honestly.

"I don't believe anyone can answer that question with 'yes' or 'no'. Sometimes I am so happy, Adam, that I feel it's almost too wonderful. And then sometimes things seem dark and uncertain. When we are alone together I am happiest. But we're not often alone now. It's made me afraid—lest we should lose touch."

"Is that my fault?"

"I don't know. You've kept yourself deliberately out of my life, haven't you? You haven't seemed to care."

He sat down suddenly at her writing table under the light. His hands lay loosely clenched in front of him. His big body was bowed and huddled looking, as though in pain or great exhaustion.

She went on desperately. "Perhaps I'm unjust, too. I haven't understood. I've tried. If I've hurt you, you've hurt me. I've had to go on with my life. People have claims on me. I couldn't help myself. I thought you understood."

"I did," he said almost inaudibly.

"I thought you would join in—that you would know that I should be unhappy without you. And you kept away."

He turned his face towards her.

"I didn't want you to be ashamed."

"Ashamed?"

He nodded heavily.

"You see—I've got to keep you, little wife. I've got to. If I lost you—I'd go right off my head. It's weak to say so, but loving you hasn't made me weak. It's kept me going when other men would have died. It made me do things that made you proud of me. That night in the hospital—well, I'd have done something anyway, I expect, but I couldn't have done what I did if you hadn't been there. It was sort of being inspired. Well, that sort of thing works both ways. It's kept me alive—it could do for me. So I've got to keep you. And if you're ashamed of me I'll lose you—I know that. And it'll be quite fair. You married a man you could be proud of. It'll be like breaking a bargain."

"Oh, Adam—don't—I can't listen to you." She was on her knees beside him, shaking him by the arms in a passion of frightened protest and horror. "I won't have you make me out so wicked, so cruel and unloving."

His hand closed tremblingly on hers.

"But you have been ashamed all the same—time after time. Though I haven't known what I've done, I've known what you felt. And I made up my mind that I'd keep out of the way until I'd proved I was good for something, and that you wouldn't have to blush for me."

He had overwhelmed her. She was crying without restraint. His own face was wet.

"I've never been ashamed. I've been sorry—I've wanted to spare you. It's hurt me sometimes when silly little things have blinded people to what you really are. But I've always known in my heart. I haven't forgotten."

"If it went on you would forget."

"Then you would have a right to be ashamed of me—I shouldn't be fit for you to love. And I love you—love you—love you." She said it over and over again with a kind of triumphant challenge, and he answered her:

"God knows how I love you."

For a while they remained silent, huddled close to one another, exhausted and almost without thought.

"And I believed you were forgetting me," she whispered brokenly.

"Nights when I knew that you were going out I used to buy flowers for you," he murmured back to her.

"You never gave them to me."

"I was afraid—I wasn't sure if they'd be right—and I thought you'd feel you had to wear them."

She kissed him and suddenly out of their weariness—perhaps out of a secret despair—their passion leapt on them, fusing them in a fierce merciless embrace. It was as though by a supreme effort it was to crush every

dissension out of their memories—out of their very lives.

But in the very midst of that exaltation the thought struck like a knife blow through Ursula's brain:

"To-morrow—when it's all over—what shall we have left to talk about?"

CHAPTER XI

1

THEY stopped for a moment outside the station to make way for a laden goods train, and through the blurred, rain-smeared windows Brodie looked out impatiently. He was tired from a long journey, squeezed fast in an overcrowded third class carriage, and he wanted to get out and on to the job that he had set himself. He hated it and he wanted to get on to it quickly.

At first he could see nothing. Then a gust of wind caught hold of the cloud of fog and smoke and twisted it aside like a dirty straggling veil.

The railway ran straight through the town on a high embankment, so that from the train one could look over the immediate housetops to the square faced chapels, perched like sentries on the mountain spurs, and closer at hand, into the windows of the great buildings that loomed up dismally through the fallow daylight. The latter were devastated looking and fire blackened. Their windows were full of broken glass, and the unsteady flicker in the darkness beyond suggested gutted but still smouldering ruins.

A narrow cobbled street ran parallel to the embankment. Here the houses were one storied, without yard or garden, and the dirt had painted them to a uniform drabness. The doors gaped open and bedraggled, neutral

tinted figures slipped in and out like rats from a row of open drain pipes.

In spite of the rain, children were playing in the gutter.

There was mud everywhere. The platform was slimy with it. It bespattered the faded advertisements on the walls and the taint of it was in the air. The people who carried Brodie with them through the gloomy subway had not escaped it. Or perhaps they did not want to escape, but like animals had taken on the colour of their surroundings in self-protection. Their clothes and faces were grey looking as though the dirt and fog had soaked into their blood.

They moved heavily and silently with a kind of grim inevitableness.

Outside the station in the cobbled enclosure stood a solitary and dilapidated four-wheeler. Its owner, as ancient as itself, who had watched Brodie anxiously, lost interest in him at once.

"Straight up th' hill," he answered, adding with an unsmiling significance, "you can't help but come against it."

Brodie thanked him. He hated the look of accustomed resignation which had come into the wrinkled face. He wished he could have explained that fifteen shillings and a return ticket constituted his own entire fortune.

It was queer what a number of trams there were. They followed one another in a clanging, jolting procession—almost empty but having an air of aloof importance, as though they had some secret business of their own that lay apart from these mean shops and narrow streets and drab people.

Brodie crossed their tracks and began the ascent of

the hill. He was absorbed again in the rehearsal of what he was going to say and how he was going to say it, and yet afterwards he remembered receiving an impression of something dwarfed and deformed—houses that had tumbled up anyhow, half finished roads, a place that had been thrust into life—not to live but to serve a purpose that would sweep everything aside pitilessly when it had attained itself.

Towards the summit of the hill the jerry-built villas, struggling for respectability, degenerated into squalid one roomed cottages which, in their turn, melted away as even weeds will do in the proximity of some deep rooted thirsty tree. Then came high walls and an iron gate, finely wrought and guarded by lions rampant, but rusting into decay. It made a fitting entry to the avenue of dying oaks, whose scanty smoke-laden leaves dropped in melancholy cadence into the water-logged neglected roadway.

At the end of the avenue, on a slight eminence, was Ivonrood itself.

To Brodie, who could not have told an Elizabethan house from the prize effort of a Garden Suburb, it meant nothing. He did not even see the noble chimneys and rich mullioned windows, which would have held the meanest architectural critic in delight and pity. Its character, in the midst of this inferno of industrialism, did not even strike him as incongruous. For him it was merely a big house such as lords lived in naturally, and which the rain and fog had blackened into uniformity with the rest of things.

The old man servant left him standing in the hall and went, soft footed as a ghost, up the wide central stairs. The dusk that came through the diamond paned windows drew warm shadows from the black oak panel-

ling, and the head of a Royal that hung over the doorway had a fantastic look of life as though it were peering out of its forests at some doubtful intruder.

It was very quiet. Whatever had grown up outside the dreams of generations still lurked in the dim corners. Even Brodie, with his heart thudding in sick anticipation, felt their presence as something grave and tranquilizing. What was the use of minding things so much anyhow? One couldn't do more than what seemed best and right.

Somewhere over head a door opened, letting out a voice raised in high anger. A minute later two men came down the stairs. They came quickly as though they were being hunted, and as they glanced at Brodie in involuntary curiosity, he saw that they were perplexed and anxious looking. As they reached the door, Ivonrood himself appeared at the head of the stairs. His face in the half-light had an unnatural whiteness that was almost luminous.

"Remember what I say," he said. "I've said it for the last time."

The man nearest Brodie shrugged his shoulders and, without answering, both went out, closing the door cautiously behind them. Ivonrood made a gesture with his open hand as though he were cutting himself free from an invisible entanglement.

"I've done with them!" he said. "The wretched cowards!"

The old servant appeared at his elbow, speaking to him in a soothing restraining undertone, and he turned at last in Brodie's direction. His expression relaxed, and he jerked his head imperatively.

"Come up, come up!" he said. "Don't stand dithering there, for God's sake——"

"To think that our race can breed such supine weaklings as that!" Ivonrood muttered. He turned over a heap of papers on the table with a trembling disgust. "There's the biggest contract the Steel Works have ever had. Dutch. And snatched straight out of the enemy's teeth. And what do they want? That I should set to and build palaces for them to lounge in! My God! And those two poor-spirited mongrels want me to compromise. They're afraid for their skins and they've done their level best to make me shiver for mine. That's all they know about me." He began to mutter indistinctly to himself, and then abruptly he pointed out of the window. "On clear days you can see from one end of the valley to the other," he said with a gentle childish pleasure. "There are 20,000 hands working between here and the Gap—men and women. Night and day. Now look here——" He took Brodie by the arm. Two walls of the room were lined with books, but on the third wall were various old engravings, and among them, in the place of honour, was Edward Jones' loving picture. Even now it made Adam Brodie laugh, just as Ursula had laughed. "That's as it used to be," Ivonrood said. "More or less. It's changed, eh?"

"Wonderfully," Brodie said. He knew that he was trying to propitiate this failing old man. He trod his self-disgust stubbornly underfoot. "It's something to have built up in a life time," he added.

Ivonrood nodded, but did not answer. He remained staring at the picture, and it occurred to Brodie that he had been forgotten—that in all probability he had never been recognized.

"Perhaps you don't remember that you wrote to me that I was to come and see you, Lord Ivonrood," he said. The other turned slowly.

"Did I? Oh, yes—yes. Let me see, who is it? Unfortunately my mind is going, and forgetfulness is one of the most trying symptoms. It's Brodie, isn't it? Major Brodie?"

"Well, the 'Major' can be dropped now. I'm demobbed alright. I shall be out of uniform in a day or two."

He knew by Ivonrood's expression of brightening malice that his mind had cleared. He braced himself to meet the familiar, ironical suavity.

"Dear me, that will be very interesting. I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing you in civilian clothes, Mr. Brodie. Well, so it seems I wanted to meet you again. You must really forgive me if I have forgotten why."

"It was me who wanted to see you, sir."

"Is that so? Won't you sit down? I must try and gather my old wits together. Ursula's husband. Wait. I seem to have a recollection that at our last meeting you promised to have something agreeable to tell me. Is that it?"

"I'd hoped to have something. It hasn't come off."

"Indeed?"

"I applied for a regular commission, sir. I thought—I was sure of it. It has been refused."

He had meant to be more elaborate—to explain. But he was finding difficulty enough to speak at all. He had a tormented feeling which, against his will, was making him dogged and untractable.

Ivonrood dropped down into his chair by the table. His body had shrivelled in the last months so that by contrast his white domed head appeared the more grotesquely dominating.

"Very unfortunate for the Army I'm sure. But what can I do about it, Mr. Brodie?"

Brodie stiffened to the last effort.

"Why, I've been thinking about what you said, sir. I've been talking it over with Ursula. You see—I've known all along what they—her people—and Ursula, too, felt about things. They thought it wrong and stupid of me to refuse help. And—and perhaps they're right. I'd meant to manage on my own. But—well, things aren't as easy as I thought. At any rate I don't feel I have the right any more—I want to do what's best all round—even if—well, I'm sort of proud too in my way. In fact, sir, if you've got a job for me I'll take it and do my best with it and be grateful."

He was wet with perspiration. But it was done. He had gone over the top somehow. He was thankful that Ivonrood did not look at him. He had become suddenly conscious that he was splashed to the knees with mud, and that his hands were grimy from the journey.

Ivonrood spoke after a long silence.

"Well, I have been thinking things over, too. My powers of thinking are limited, and I cannot afford the polite wrappings in which to offer you the truth. The truth is that I don't want you at all, Mr. Brodie. I want to get you out of the way. You don't fit into our scheme of things. It is a misfortune for us all—yourself included—that Ursula should have married you. At first I thought you might be possible—but you are not. You are quite hopeless. And you are making my granddaughter unhappy. I have seen it. She is losing her colour and her fine spirit. She is my heir. You know that, of course. She may be the last of us. But the best qualities of my family are in her, and they must not be lost. I don't want her children to be your children, Mr. Brodie. You are a grocer. I have nothing against grocers. I am not a snob—but they lack certain qualities

which I consider essential in my granddaughter's husband—otherwise they would not be grocers. Moreover I fear you are something of a fool, Mr. Brodie. You should have seized my offer when I was in the mood to make it. You did not make the most of the opportunities you married into."

"Wait a moment, Lord Ivonrood. We don't either of us want to say things we'll be sorry for. I married Ursula because I loved her——"

"I know very little about love, Mr. Brodie. It must be a great affliction if it leads people to do what you have done. Nor is there any likelihood of my saying anything I might regret. At present my mind is quite clear. I have an offer for you and I have been waiting for you to ask for it. I offer you £20,000 to clear out of this country and to take any woman you like with you, so that Ursula shall have the power to divorce you."

Brodie stood up involuntarily. He felt dazed and sick, as though he had been beaten all over.

"You think she'd do it?"

"I'm certain. Ursula is a sportswoman. She would not want to withhold your freedom."

"For £20,000 I'm to pretend to be unfaithful?"

"Isn't it enough?"

And then an extraordinary sense of relief came to Adam Brodie. He had been labouring under an enormous burden of fear of this old man. Looking back, his fear seemed almost funny.

"You said you don't know much about love," he said, "and that's true. You don't. That's what's the matter with you. You don't understand why I married Ursula, or why she married me. You don't know anything about human beings at all, or you wouldn't 'ave been so silly or so cruel as to 'ave talked the way you've done. You

would have guessed what it cost me to come down here. Well, anyhow Ursula and I are man and wife. You can understand that, I suppose. We've sworn a holy oath to one another, and we're both of us that sort that we'll keep it—or, if it should ever come that we couldn't any more, we'd be honest with one another. We'd play fair. We'd expect it of each other. We know what we're made of because we've been through things. You don't know anything about us—not even about Ursula. I wouldn't play a trick like that on her—not even to make her happy. But it wouldn't. We belong to each other. As to your £20,000——” he brought his fist down on the table with a violence that scattered the papers to right and left, “you've called me a fool, Lord Ivonrood—but it's you who are the fool—an old fool. And you haven't even behaved like a gentleman.”

Afterwards, stumbling down the black and dripping avenue, it struck him that he had been very like a penny novelette again. Very theatrical. Probably Ivonrood's blank silence had been one of disgust rather than of awe.

Well, he had said what he wanted to say, anyhow.

And this time he had burnt his boats with a vengeance.

It was night now. The lights lent the narrow bustling High Street a garish picturesqueness. The shop windows blazed so that their contents seemed almost splendid. The trams, packed now with a soaked and sweating herd of returning workers, clanged past like gorgeous replete fireflies. Knots of men and women lingered at the street corners and outside the public houses and the gaudy cinema with an air of dull and brooding expectation. A man standing on a soap box in a side street addressed a gathering crowd of them in an untrained strident voice that battled heroically with the

bang and clatter of traffic. Someone held up a lantern for him to read by, and the light flickered into his scowling eyes and dirt-streaked face.

His mouth gaped like a black hole.

An hour later the express started Londonwards. It had stopped raining, and from his corner seat Brodie could see the blaze of furnaces from end to end of the valley. Some of them threw such a wide glow about them that it seemed to him he could make out the dim outline of the mountains themselves. It was like looking into the mouth of a crater—or down onto a Belgian town that had caught fire under bombardment.

And suddenly the suggestion of conflict—a ceaseless fight against a tangible enemy—fired him, so that he wanted to go back again and down into the midst of it.

2

Instead, he arrived in London at three o'clock in the morning, stiff and wretched and hungry, with his clothes still damp on him. It was too early to go back to Great Cumberland Street. At an Overseas Officer's club near the station he slept well into the day, and then breakfasted. It chanced that a man whom he had known casually in France sat at the same table with him, and though he had no particular liking for young Robertson, he was glad of an excuse to linger with him. Afterwards, at Robertson's invitation, they lunched together and spent a couple of hours at a Revue, where Brodie contracted a light-heartedness as spurious as the amusement offered them.

"We're a sight too serious about ourselves," he declared. "In fifty years time nobody'll care what we thought or worried about. So why think or worry?"

Robertson was genially in agreement.

"You're right, old bird. Take things easy. Drift with the tide. Personally, if Bolshevism is to be the fashion, I'm going to be a Bolshevik. There's a little place in Park Lane which I've got my eye on for looting purposes. Might get a commission in the Red Guard and shoot off some of the dear old relatives who disapprove of my blameless youth. Eh, what?"

Brodie roared with laughter.

He did not recognize himself. He remembered having had certain fears and hopes and emotions which now seemed ridiculous and out of proportion. Anyway they were gone. He felt numb and indifferent. If there was a vague misery underlying his indifference, it was of a negative nature and due chiefly to the fact that he no longer cared about anything. Not even about Ursula. He could not bring himself to think what he would say to her or about the future in any shape.

"Have a good time whilst you can get it," Robertson said over their third drink together.

Well, there was something in that.

His mind, that refused every other thought, laid fast hold of this new philosophy. Emotionally and physically it satisfied and excited him. He did not want to go back to the big house. He did not want to meet Ursula. He did not want to be everlastingly up against things. He wanted to have a good time like everybody else.

Margaret Seton met him as he came in. She stood at the foot of the dim staircase and waited for him. The rich fire-coloured evening wrap which she wore loosely over her black dress made her look like some gorgeous exotic flower, at once seductive and repellent. She was not beautiful, but she had the subtle charm of

race—the fascination of something exquisite which corruption has touched with light passing fingers.

"Ursula is out to dinner," she said. "We weren't expecting you till to-morrow. But you have come back in time for me."

He found that he liked the look of deep half tormenting, half kindly understanding in her eyes. He liked to feel that he could abandon himself to her without reserve—that nothing he could show her could disappoint or puzzle her.

"I've done for myself this time," he said.

"I knew you would," she answered casually. "I'm going to a dance, and as Esmé has refused to accompany me you are coming instead. Nothing else has got to matter to you. When can you be ready?"

"But I can't dance—not your sort of dances."

"I don't mind. I'll teach you anything you need to know. It will be an experience for you."

"And Ursula——"

"You think too much about Ursula. It's such a mistake, dear Adam. Besides, I want you. Just for once we're going to have a good time together."

She was the very embodiment of his mood. He wanted to go with her. He was flattered, intoxicated, by the implied friendship between them. He felt, too, a kind of jeering triumph, as though in going he snapped his fingers in the face of things.

"Give me ten minutes, Margaret."

She touched him lightly as she went on into the library.

"I'll wait for you."

He learnt eventually to understand Margaret Seton, and to regard the sickness of life from which she suffered with a pity free from either disgust or contempt.

But that was after many years, when he himself had attained happiness.

"You will be at your ease amongst these people," she said to him, "because they have ceased to pretend. They have done with humbug in all its forms. Like most of us, they are rotten through and through, but they have the decency to be honest about it. It is like a breath of fresh air to be amongst them." She turned her white face smilingly towards him. "And you must be as they are, Adam. Be honest, too. Then if you are the devil himself—or just a grocer's son—they will understand and like you."

He laughed. He was not in the least hurt. The others fumbled and bungled with the wound, in their efforts to spare him, but her knife was clean and sharp, like that of a clever surgeon.

"Ever since I've been back I've had to pretend I'm something I'm not," he said. "I'm dead sick of it. I'll be glad to be just a common or garden human being."

The car had stopped in a quiet side-street, and she was looking out of the window.

"What is 'just a human being'?" she asked, as though of herself. "And what happens—in the end—to people who stop pretending? Do they cut their throats, I wonder?"

He did not answer, because he did not understand. She got out and led the way into the house opposite them and, by a passage, into a long dim gallery with wide doorways that were like the framework of miniature stages across which rhythmically moving marionettes passed in a ceaseless procession. There were pictures on the walls and for several minutes Brodie saw nothing else. A shaded, cylindrical-shaped lamp hung over each

frame and the subdued reflection from the staring canvases constituted the only light. So that it seemed as though the strange people and the strange landscapes of the pictures were more real than the living people and the room itself.

It was like a fairy tale that he had read years ago, and which had subsequently become a nightmare.

There was music from an invisible band, and the dancers passed from one room to another. They brushed softly against Brodie and his companion like bats at dusk. Once before he had been at a fancy dress ball. That had been with Clara and there had been a jolly medley of Pierrots and Pierrettes and Toreadors and Spanish dancers and one soul, more daring than the rest, had come as Satan, with horns and a tail. But this was quite different. These people had gone beyond heaven and earth for the source of their phantasy. They represented nothing that had ever been, as far as Brodie knew, and yet he had a queer conviction that they were true—that something mysterious and unsuspected within himself recognized them.

Margaret touched his arm.

"I am Master of the Ceremonies to-night," she said. "I have to dress for the part. And anyhow it will be more amusing for you to fend for yourself, Adam."

She left him standing there, an awkward, lonely looking figure. But he did not feel awkward or even lonely. That was one blessing about having ceased to care. One ceased also to be self-conscious. It did not matter any longer what people thought about you.

Two dancers broke off suddenly and came over to him. The man was in evening dress, but evening dress that had been rendered into an exquisite caricature of itself. His small, clean-shaven face had great charm and

even beauty, so that Brodie looked at him before he realized his slender glowing companion.

"We want to know who you are," she said.

Brodie smiled back at her easily.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm trying to find out."

"Your costume——" She hung her head, with its boyish crop of hair, critically on one side. "It reminds me of something. Thousands of years ago, wasn't there what they called a Great War, and didn't men go about in some such unlovely dress? Tell me, Theo, your memory is better than mine."

The young man assented gravely.

"I recollect hearing of some such event," he said.

"Then if you don't know who you are, we can tell you. You are a Prehistoric Monster. A Pleiosaurus. Do you feel like one?"

"As much like that as anything else," Brodie laughed.

"And this is Theoditus," she went on, indicating her companion. "He used to write wonderful sonnets in Athens, and one day he is going to write about something which no one has ever even dared think about, but he is not quite mad enough yet. I am Life. You see how beautiful I look. But the doctors say that inside I am quite awful. They don't think I can live more than a few months, and I don't think so either—except when I am dancing, and then I know that I shall live for ever and ever. Will you dance with me?"

"I can't dance," Brodie said. "Only old fashioned sort of things—waltzes, you know."

"Of course. What else could a Pleiosaurus do? Let us waltz then. It will be so primitive. Good-bye, Theo. Offer prayers to Aphrodite for your inspiration."

The last time Brodie had danced it had been with Clara—the night before he had joined up. The band of

the shilling dance hall had played an old sentimental waltz, and Clara had cried openly. He had a sudden and vivid recollection of the tears running slowly and heavily down her flushed cheeks.

"You must give yourself up to me," the girl said, "or you will spoil my dancing. I can feel all your thick respectable thoughts weighing me down. You must think with me."

"How can I do that?" he said. "I don't know what you think."

"Empty your mind. And then everything will tell you. That is what these costumes are for, and those pictures. If you will look long enough at those naked men dancing in a circle, for instance, you will begin to know. At first sight they must seem funny and queer to you, like a child's drawings, but they mean something—something millions of years old that lies curled up at the bottom of us. If you wait you will begin to feel it uncoil itself."

"I expect I am duller than you people," he said. "You see, I'm not even a soldier now. In real life I'm just a grocer-boy."

"You mean you pretend to be. Nobody could really be a grocer-boy. You're Margaret's brother-in-law, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then we know all about you. You're very unhappy, aren't you?"

"I suppose I am."

"It's not necessary to be. It's very foolish of you. Are you unhappy now?"

"I don't know."

She slipped her hand from his shoulder and from the golden bodice of her dress drew out a little enamel

box. They stopped for a moment and she opened it and took a pinch of the white powder between her fingers.

"Now we shan't be unhappy for a long time," she said. "I shall forget that I am going to die and you that you are a grocer who has married a princess by mistake. We shall only remember what we really are."

They began to dance again.

He knew what he had done. He could not afterwards exonerate himself with the plea of innocence. He knew, but he did not care.

"Think of the music," she said.

He had not thought of it before, but he had become increasingly aware of it. There was no tune that he could catch, only a stark dominating rhythm that seemed always on the point of breaking out into something demonic. And it went on and on. It got into the blood. It frayed the nerves with its insistent monotony.

"We have a band of South Sea Islanders, or some wild tribe or other, to play for us," his companion said. "They used to eat people, but now they are wonderful musicians. They never stop. Have you noticed that? They work themselves into a state of hysteria sometimes, and then anything might happen." She laughed to herself. "Extremes meet, don't they? We decadents have a lot in common with savages. Alpha and Omega."

She danced so lightly and beautifully that he forgot his clumsiness and passed without effort into her step. When they came nearer to the light he saw her face, small and sweet and haggard, and with that look of enigmatic knowledge that was in Margaret's eyes. She smiled back at him.

"It's all strange to you, Pleiosaurus, isn't it?"

"I've never met people like you before," he answered

unsteadily. "You're different—though I don't know what it is."

"We're dying and we know we're dying, and we don't pretend. And so we drink anything that comes to hand. I might quote Omar to you. Though it's hackneyed, it might not seem hackneyed to a grocer. Are you getting tired?"

"I don't feel as though I'd ever be tired again."

It was true enough. He was possessed of a limitless energy and sense of power that made nothing impossible to him. He tried to remember what he had been worrying about, but the whole thing slipped away from him like mist.

"We have no illusions and no hope," she said drowsily. "We are like the gods."

He did not know how long they danced. They stopped at last by an alcove where a table had been set out with glass jars in which were deep-coloured wines and spirits that glowed like jewels under the dim light. The young man Theoditus beckoned to them. In silence he poured out a few drops from each jar into the long narrow glasses. He had very beautiful hands—slender and yet powerful.

"Your cocaine is a poor thing," he said, "without heart or soul. It takes everything and cheats you with a sham. But this is from God." He looked at Brodie earnestly. "You have been a soldier, haven't you? And were wounded? I was studying some old and very absorbing records in Thessaly during the greater part of the war, but I saw what you call the Somme film when I was in Spain. There was a picture that I remember vividly of an English soldier. He was dead. A remarkable pose. Praxiteles would have died of envy."

"They weren't all like that," Brodie said.

He began to tell them of some of the things that he had seen. He told them horrible things which he had driven into his sub-consciousness to save his sanity. But now they came rushing gleefully from their prison. Theoditus and his companion seemed to come nearer to him and to grow larger and yet less distinct. Their eyes were black, hungry holes, feasting on him.

He told them of his escape with a vividness not his own, and of other adventures that had never happened to him at all. He knew that he was lying, but had no sense of shame or even of surprise. He drank whatever they gave him.

"What you have told me is very precious," the young man said at last. "I am to dance to-night. Modern people think that dancing is a mere matter of physical dexterity. The ancients knew better. It is the expression of the mind and soul—of a thought, of a whole philosophy. You have given me my inspiration."

Brodie heard him fitfully. He himself seemed to be climbing up on to a great height and sounds came to him as though carried by the wind. He heard his companions talk of a book called "Aphrodite". They discussed it and its correctness of detail with regard to the Great Temple and of the rites there. He was aware of something incredible that he accepted without question. He was passing through an extraordinary initiation. His head was breaking through the clouds.

Long afterwards he found himself stretched out on the skin of some animal, his chin propped in his hands, staring blankly into a wide circle of light. He did not know how he had come there, but he knew that he had not for a moment lost consciousness. The rest of the dancers were lying in groups under the shadow of the

walls. The lamps over the pictures had been turned out, and there was now only this new central light and a faint glow over the dais at the far end of the room where Margaret sat. She still wore her black dress. Its utter simplicity stood out harshly amidst the garish colours. On her dark head, fitting down close over the ears, she wore a travesty of a skull.

Life lay outstretched and motionless at her feet.

Brodie had never seen Margaret as she was now. The weary, cynical tolerance was gone. She had the look of someone who has passed from unreality to reality—from a poor dream to its gorgeous fulfilment. There was an expression almost of beatification on her dead-white face.

The young man Theoditus came into the circle of light. He stood there for a full minute without moving, his hands limp at his sides, his head slightly inclined as though he were listening intently. The music stopped. In the absolute silence Brodie thought he heard a signal whispered. He could not have told whence it came.

Theoditus began to dance. At first his steps were tentative and uncertain. He still had an air of listening to an indistinct message. But each movement was an exquisite thing, its incompleteness the daringly broken line of a poem. There was no sound from him. He moved like a leaf before the wind.

Someone laid a hand on Brodie's shoulder. He did not look to see whose hand it was, and he knew that it was unconscious of him. He himself was, for a time, held riveted, hypnotized by the light in which the dark, slender figure floated. But gradually a change came over him. It was as though a frozen sensibility within him had begun to thaw so that he became aware of himself

and of pain and of the atmosphere around him. He knew, for one thing, that he was drunk to the soul, and that there was something at once childish and terrible in this place. He did not know what it was, but he knew that it had its final expression in the man who danced.

It would have been less terrible if he had danced in the costume of some other age, and if a wild and sensuous music had accompanied him. The incongruity between his modernity and something earth-old in his movements was intolerable. The silence was a perversion.

His head was thrown back a little and his beautiful face had the wrapt, smiling expression of a poet listening to the voice of his inspiration. Every gesture had a vile austerity.

The watchers were like people drifting on the tide of a narcotic. They drew imperceptibly away from one another. They had passed out of the need of human companionship into an utter loneliness. They had left the outer courts of the Temple and had penetrated into the Holy of Holies. They knew the deepest secrets of corruption.

Adam Brodie scrambled to his feet. He had taken himself by storm and he had no idea what he intended. He was so drunk that he could hardly stand. But also he could not turn back. A race of common, decent people was behind him, up-holding him. He was Adam Brodie of Thomas Brodie & Son—Major Brodie, a good soldier, Ursula's husband and Margaret's brother, whose duty it was to shield her—who, in some dim way, was responsible.

He lurched into the circle of light.

"This has got to stop," he said loudly and thickly.

"Got to stop, you know. It's not right—it's indecent—it's blasphemy."

They did not wake at once. They stirred uneasily. The young man danced on as though he had not heard, but his face had darkened. Brodie caught hold of him. "You've got to stop, I tell you. I won't 'ave it."

They were fully awake now. Whatever enchantment had held them was broken. Life slipped to her feet.

"Why, it's Pleiosaurus broken loose!"

She laughed, and in a moment they were all laughing wildly, hysterically, like people who have been caught back from a half-realised disaster. Theoditus struggled to escape, but he was not strong enough, and, in a gust of exasperation, struck Brodie across the face. The blow was not returned. Brodie released him. He had only one idea now, and he had to act on it before he forgot what it was. He pushed his way violently through the crowd to Margaret's side.

"You've got to come home," he said.

He remembered putting her into the car and closing the door, and seeing her white face peer at him through the window.

"Aren't you coming too, Adam?"

He shook his head. His mouth quivered with a drunken shame and misery. He turned and ran into the darkness to hide himself.

CHAPTER XII

1

THE sense of an irrevocable loss pursued him down through the depths of sleep and up again to a shallow consciousness. It was the only thing of which he was really aware. It absorbed him utterly, as though he had lost a limb. Otherwise he was numb and stupified, incapable of even remembering. He tried to creep back into sleep, but his loss haunted him remorselessly.

He sat up at last. He found himself on a truckle bed facing a white wall and a lonely picture of a very plain and oddly dressed woman holding a peculiarly ugly baby in her arms. Someone had managed to take off his high military boots, but had given up an attempt to undress him, in despair. His tunic was creased and disgustingly frowsy. As he sat up his brains seemed to slip about inside his head like loose machinery. It hurt intolerably. And then, before he knew what was happening, an agonizing nausea shook him and he was sick—helplessly and pitifully sick, like a child.

Someone gave him water to drink. A gentle, timid hand wiped the sweat from his forehead and rested consolingly on his shoulder.

"You'll feel better now."

The voice was familiar, but Brodie remained with his face hidden. His shame was abject. It turned his courage to water, so that he would neither recognise his

companion nor himself nor the nature of his loss. His only conscious desire was that he should somehow be blotted out before that recognition became inevitable.

Instead his brain grew clearer. His stubborn temper revived like a personal and vindictive devil that drove him out of apathy into action. The still, small voice of the Puritan in him was already beginning its demand on him. Deliberately he lowered his hands, clasping them about his knees.

But for the change in himself he could have believed that nothing had happened except that Ursula had failed to meet him. This might have been his first morning in England. The scene at any rate had not changed. There were the same pictures—the same books. A tray had been set out on a table before the fire. Alec Quinn, his angular middle-aged figure crouched boyishly, watched his frying bacon with a solemn intentness. But Adam Brodie, the returning hero, had become a drunkard, staggering up after a night's debauch.

Quinn turned smiling, preoccupied eyes in his direction.

"You'll think me very impertinent, Major Brodie," he said. "But I took two shillings out of your pocket. I was sure you would be hungry when you woke up, and this isn't my breakfast morning. I hope you like fried eggs. I couldn't think of anything else."

Brodie found this so horribly funny that he laughed. He got up and came stiffly over to the fireplace, but he was still weak and sick, and had to cling to the mantelpiece for support.

"I'd like to know how I came here," he said. "I don't remember a thing."

"I don't know how you came either," Quinn answered, "but you banged at my door about three o'clock

in the morning. Fortunately I had stayed up reading and let you in at once. Otherwise you might have woken the whole street."

"It was jolly decent of you."

"Oh no, I was glad."

"Glad I was dead drunk?"

"No. Glad you came to me—glad you thought of me, you know."

Brodie stared down stupidly at the bowed head with its thin wispy covering of pale hair.

"I didn't think of you once whilst I was having a good time—not once. But when I'm up against things I bang you up at three o'clock in the morning. That's a fine fellow for you!"

"I don't think I want people to come to me when they're having a good time," Quinn answered. "I'm not a good companion then. I'm no use. But people like you——"

"Drunks, eh?" He corrected himself with an aggressive laugh. "Well, I wasn't drunk. Not decently drunk anyhow. I'd been taking dope—cocaine—morphia—I don't know what. A dope fiend, that's what I am."

Quinn transferred his two eggs deftly from the frying-pan to the plate warming on the fender.

"Stuff!" he said.

Brodie was swept by a violent resentment.

"But I tell you I did."

"You may have done. But if you were what you call a dope fiend you wouldn't look as you do, ready to cut your throat. You'd be bragging about it—or holding your tongue. Sit down, dear fellow. You've got to pull yourself together sooner or later, and you might as well begin now."

Brodie sat down, his anger gone as suddenly as it

had come. He ate what Quinn gave him to eat like a child, with the tears of shame and weakness blinding him. When he had finished, Quinn removed the tray. There was an unexpected authority about the older man, as though in his effort to replace Brodie's paralyzed will-power he himself had grown stronger and more capable. "You'll find hot water and soap behind the screen," he said. "You'd better go and tidy up. If you give me your coat I'll run an iron over it. You've no idea how handy I can be."

Brodie obeyed him. He came back in half an hour sober and incredibly dissipated looking. To Quinn he seemed the wreck of the man he had met for the first time only a few months before—the more so now when the outward order revealed more painfully the fundamental disintegration. In grief and pity for him Quinn turned away. He took the new briar pipe from the mantelshelf and stuffed it with fumbling fingers.

"You see I still keep my little stock going," he said. "No soldiers come now, thank God, but one never knows—there are always people in trouble in this world, aren't there?"

"Always," Brodie said. He took the pipe and lit it, considering his shaking hand with a cruel interest. "And if ever you run short of them there'll always be me to fall back upon." He sat down stretching his booted feet to the fire, assuming a callous ease. He was not callous, only his shame was deepening to a reasoned, utter despair.

"I'm a bad case, aren't I?" he asked, laughing.

Quinn did not answer. He stood opposite Brodie, staring absently ahead. His bony hands were clasped in front of him in an attitude comically reminiscent of a prim but nervous schoolgirl.

"There's one thing I ought to say to you at once, Major," he began formally. "When you came here last night you were intoxicated. As you say—it was not ordinary intoxication. You were a little mad and you talked a great deal. You told me things—about yourself and others—that you would never have told me in other circumstances. I think you ought to know that——"

"Thank you," Brodie interrupted. "It's pleasant to realise that I can't even take my dope like a gentleman."

"That you talked, at any rate, does not need to trouble you," Quinn stammered on. "As far as I am concerned it is all buried and forgotten. All that remains is—is understanding. I'd like you to know that I understand."

Brodie lifted his bloodshot eyes to the angular, unprepossessing figure opposite him. The scrutiny was almost furtive like that of an animal that has been bewildered and hurt into perpetual distrust. Finally he shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't mind who knows what a mess I've made of things," he said. "I'm rather glad. I'm down and out. I haven't a breath of bluff left in me."

"That's all right," Quinn murmured.

But his hands were twitching in inexplicable distress. It was evident he had not said all he meant to say, and that he was trying to drive himself on again. His emotion made him grotesque, and Brodie looked impatiently away from him. He looked at the pictures behind whose mysterious ugliness he divined now an unrealizable beauty, and at the books he would never read. His old resentment against them was dead. He was too humbled—too utterly beaten. In a way they softened him. He felt dimly that they were much above the things that had defeated him, that from their serene heights they judged

him more gently than the Setons judged him—more gently than he judged himself.

"When I came here before I was all blown out about what I'd done," he said. "I'd made good. An officer and a gentleman—me a grocer's son. I didn't believe there was another like me. Now I'm just a tin soldier with all the paint knocked off."

Alec Quinn hung his head on one side, looking towards the window as though he heard something beyond the unbroken murmur of the streets.

"It's a great day here," he said. "The London regiments are marching through. Did you know?"

Brodie stirred angrily. It seemed to him that he had been laughed at. His misery and degradation had been thrust aside as of no account.

"I didn't, and I don't care. What's that to do with me?"

"Why—I was just thinking—if you wanted to you could go out and cheer them, couldn't you? You'd have the right."

"Of course. Who hasn't?"

"I haven't," Quinn said. He dropped his eyes quickly, looking down at his shaking hands. "You see, Major Brodie, if I went out and cheered it would be the beastliest, the most loathly sort of humbug—the kind of false sentimentality that makes decent people sick. It would be as though I cheered men I had tried to murder, or had watched drown without holding out a helping hand. And yet I'd put my hand in this fire—I'd give my life," he broke into a shaken high-pitched laugh. "I suppose you think I am mad or hysterical, don't you?" he asked.

"I—I don't understand," Brodie muttered.

Quinn went on with a breathless haste.

"I am telling you all this, Major, because you are in

trouble. Things haven't gone as you expected them. I can see that for myself. You will think it an intrusion—an impertinence—when I say that in spite of everything—I envy you. I should envy you if you were in the gutter, or crippled, or so disfigured that even people who loved you couldn't look at you without horror. Among the other things you called yourself last night was 'outsider'. You can never be the outsider that I am." He was quieter now. He spoke with a certain dignity. "It sounds easy talk—but when pious people say that an injury done to a man's soul is the most awful thing that can happen to him they are more right than they know. It is frightfully true. Finally, it is the whole terror of death, Major Brodie."

In the silence that followed, Adam Brodie kept his eyes stubbornly averted. He knew, with a kind of surprised resentment, that this man was suffering—in some way sacrificing himself so that his own hardness of heart might be touched.

"You see, Major Brodie, in 1914 I was an Internationalist and a believer in a Universal Brotherhood. Perhaps you have not met the terms. At any rate, like most men of that ilk, I was primarily a liar. Because there was always one nation which I detested and always one branch of the human family that I held up to contempt and ridicule—my own country and my own people. So for the first three years of the war I criticised and sneered and condemned. Every sin and error that England had ever committed I dragged out to prove my contentions. It was six of one and half a dozen of another. This victory was really a defeat and that atrocity was newspaper propaganda. In any case we had done worse things ourselves elsewhere and would do them again if we had the chance. At first it was quite honest,

but gradually I began to lie—to spread rumours that I knew to be false. And it was a queer and terrible thing how my cynicism and bitterness spread over my whole being, so that there was nothing noble left in the world for me—nothing that was not fundamentally vile—even among our enemies.”

“A Conchy,” Brodie said under his breath. He was watching his companion now, fascinated, self-oblivious. He had always thought of “Conchys” as a contemptible war product. He had forgotten that they went on living.

“Not in the strict sense,” Quinn said, “because I was never asked to fight. I was obviously unfit. Still, I lost my position. I cannot tell you what joy that gave me. It seemed to justify me. But also it was as fresh poison in my blood. I began to triumph in our defeats—to gloat over our casualty lists. I was ghoulish—hideous. Major Brodie, sometimes when I wake up at night an awful conviction comes to me that I am responsible—that it was my evil will that brought about these defeats—these deaths. But that, I know, is just morbidity.” He unlocked his clenched hands to wipe the sweat from his face. “I tell you all this, Major Brodie, because you are unhappy, and you have no right, no reason. You took your share in the catastrophe and grew big in it. You see, in the end I came to repentance. It was quite sudden. I believe in that conversion on the road to Damascus because something of the sort happened to me. It was in March, 1918, and we were fighting the most frightful battle of all. And we had fought on five years, giving blood, a treasure, as it had never been given before. I say ‘we.’ You will forgive me. I was in a Bakerloo tube train packed with infantry going back to the front. Yes, going back. There was one man

with four wound stripes. They were graver than any soldiers I had ever seen, but also there was a serenity, a confidence. The triumph of humanity over death seemed to be in these men. I was also an Intellectual, Major Brodie, a man who stood aloof, to whom the mob was always detestable, the majority always in the wrong. And then in that stifling, overcrowded train the instinct for my kind bore down on me, the love for them. I got out at the next station. I came back to this room and fell on my knees and prayed. I do not believe in God, but I prayed till my heart seemed to break in me. And after that I went from one place to another, asking them to give me a chance to die—to send me on some forlorn, hopeless quest—anything. I believe they were sorry for me. You see, they thought I had gone mad.”

Brodie got up and went over to the window. He felt he could not bear to remain close to this grief. It was pitiful the way this man had stript himself. But his own hardness and despair had gone. Something of the old glamour and romance was flowing back to him. After all there was more to life than just whether a man dropped his ‘hs’ or whether he made a fool of himself. There were things that none and nothing could take from him. Ursula had said that when they had left each other in the forest at Fontainebleau.

“And then victory came,” Alec Quinn went on, “and the Armistice was signed, and for me it was too late.”

Brodie stared down blindly on to the dusty, faded trees of the old square.

“Is that why you used to come to the station, looking for stray fellows to help?”

“Yes. It may seem laughable. But I was very grateful——”

"I am not laughing," Brodie muttered.

He had only one thought now, and that was not of himself. He wanted desperately to offer some comfort, some reassurance, but he was afraid. His easily fired imagination had been kindled to an understanding pity, but he had learnt in bitterness that when he felt most he blundered worst.

"If I were Esmé Monteith I'd know what to do," he thought involuntarily. "It's this not being a gentleman."

Alec Quinn had dropped down into the empty chair. He looked much older and very tired.

"You have made mistakes—bad mistakes, no doubt, Major Brodie," he said. "But you can pick yourself up and start again. You will be able to reassure yourself with your own past. But I shall always remember that I was contemptible—mine is the only disaster that matters to a man."

They were silent for a long time. They both knew that the subject was closed finally. They would never speak of it again. At last Adam Brodie came back to the fireside. He gave Alec Quinn his hand. He was calm and cheerful—almost prosaic.

"You've been fine to me," he said. "You've helped like—like a real pal. But I've sort of got to work things out for myself. I think I'll cut along now. But I'll come back. When I've cleaned this mess up I'll come back, so as you won't have to be ashamed when I bang at your front door."

The pressure of his hand was returned. Brodie heard the other murmur something which he could not catch. He went out quickly, running down the long, dark stairs into the morning sunlight.

2

"I don't understand you, Ursula," Mr. Seton said. "I don't understand you at all." He looked from his daughter to his wife, seated at different ends of the luncheon table, with an air of one seeking an answer to a painful conundrum. "Upon my word, I don't seem to understand any one these days," he added, sighing. "I don't know what's happened to everybody."

Since the meal was over, he allowed himself to reach for the afternoon paper. But it gave him no comfort. The Metropolitan police were threatening another "walk-out" and if there was one thing that could shake Mr. Seton's belief in God it was a policeman on strike. He reverted to his first trouble. "I do know one thing, however," he said, "that if anyone I cared for was missing for twenty-four hours, I'd begin to worry."

Ursula, with her chin resting in the palm of her hand, continued to gaze in front of her unmoved.

"It's no use worrying about anything," she said. "Besides, when Margaret comes down she will be able to explain."

"I've sent up for Margaret twice," Mrs. Seton murmured. "But she was asleep——"

"My God—at one o'clock in the afternoon!" Mr. Seton flung down his paper. "It is disgusting—it's indecent. It makes me sick. But then it's all the same. Utter demoralisation everywhere. And in my boyhood we were taught to believe that suffering ennobled people——"

"It has to be the right sort of suffering," Ursula said. "One doesn't get noble on pin-pricks and disillusionment." She flushed deeply, because she found her mother's dim eyes fixed on her with a sudden clear-

ness. They told her that unconsciously she had spoken of herself. She hated the thought that she had been read, and drew back deeper into her reserve.

"Sometimes it seems to me we were all happier when the war was on," Mr. Seton exclaimed. "At any rate, we all held together and believed in something. But now where are we?"

"Where, indeed?" Ursula murmured flippantly. She got up and came round to his side and rubbed his cheek with a calculated affection. She did not feel that she loved either her father or mother in the very least. She had lain awake all night waiting for Adam, who had not come. Towards daybreak everything had appeared quite clear to her. He had failed with her grandfather and had seized the first opportunity to escape acknowledgment of the fact. He had flunked it. The schoolboy phrase re-occurred to her repeatedly with its traditional inflection of scornful tolerance. And she loved him and despised him alternately and sometimes in the same breath, till there was no feeling left in her. Little things that he had left about the room—an old khaki tie and a battered pen-knife—had touched her to a fierce remorseful tenderness. Inanimate objects have a cruel trick of absorbing into themselves all that is most lovable, most pathetically human in their owners, and the shabby possessions were somehow very like Adam Brodie. Ursula had even kissed them. Then the thought of him skulking about the streets sickened her so that she hid them out of sight.

And now she was tired out and hard and reckless. Things were tightening to snapping point and she was glad of it. She wanted change—change of any sort and at all costs.

"Please give me a lot of money, father," she said.

"A big lump sum, so that Adam and I can go and buy a ranch somewhere in Timbuctoo or South Africa or wherever in the world we can eat our peas with our knife undisturbed. We can't go on like this——"

She knew that she was all that these two had in life. Hubert was gone and Margaret did not count. She felt that they were both white to the lips. And yet they were not unprepared. It was all so obvious—so inevitable.

Mr. Seton fumbled blindly for his glasses.

"My dear, I want you to be happy. I'd do anything—upon my word, I would." For an extraordinary moment his daughter became confused in his mind with recalcitrant policemen, railwaymen, dock hands, miners, everybody in fact who seemed to be wanting something they couldn't get. "I'd like you all to be happy. I want to do my best. It's very difficult for an old man. If just money could do it all——"

Then Margaret sauntered into the room and he fell into a distressed silence. There was no one in the world whose characteristics offended and exasperated him so much as those of his eldest daughter, but he had the justice to remember that in some inexplicable way he was partly responsible for them. At this particular moment her unhealthy pallor and air of utter lassitude made him physically wretched, as though a blight had touched him. What made it worse was that he knew that Margaret understood him and appeared to offer him a kind of amused sympathy.

She kissed all three of them.

"You dear noble old frumps!" she said tolerantly. She patted Ursula's cheek. "You know, I owe you an apology and an explanation. That's why I hurried down at this ungodly hour. Adam has just come in,

and I don't want any absurd misunderstanding. I stole him. I did it deliberately. I took him to one of our most erratic fiestas and some wretched idiot of a woman gave him something to drink that upset him. But that wasn't the main trouble. A very clever young man danced for us and Adam didn't like it. He thought it disgraceful, which it no doubt was, from his point of view, and he made a quite wonderful scene. A Cromwellian Ironside at a little Restoration party couldn't have been more effective. He shook poor Theoditus out of his five senses and sent me home like a naughty child. I quite loved him——"

"You mean he was drunk?" Ursula said dangerously.

Margaret helped herself idly to the hothouse grapes that were still on the table.

"Well, yes. But then anything intoxicates an abstemious Ironside. You can't blame him."

"Why didn't he come home with you?"

"I really don't know. He fled from me as though I had been the plague. I think he was simply overcome with horror and disgust. The whole thing had knocked the bottom out of his universe."

Mrs. Seton had a troubled, uncertain look, as though she had caught a fragment of an ugly story which she could not understand. Her husband remained silent. But Ursula's anger was volcanic. In its eruption she discovered that she was not really ashamed of Adam at all, but of herself, of Margaret, even of her father and mother. It was their attitude towards him which made him seem ridiculous and futile and even cowardly. They measured him by absurd standards. They had tried to break him into their way of living and they had simply broken his courage. In their several subtle

ways they had all ill-treated him. They were unchivalrous and stupid.

"It was the meanest thing that you could have done, Margaret. You knew how he would feel. And I hate you—I hate you for it."

"Hush, Ursula. Even in anger——"

Margaret turned her white indifferent face towards her mother.

"Ursula is quite right. It was detestable of me. But it was such a tempting experiment. And life is so deadly stale——"

"It's incomprehensible," Mr. Seton broke out, finding speech at last. "I'm shocked and horrified. It's beyond everything."

"I'm beyond everything," Margaret interrupted wearily.

Mrs. Seton made a warning gesture. The door had opened and Margaret, turning her head, became at once intent and eager. A blasé theatregoer, surprised by a new and piquant dénouement, might have worn the same expression.

Adam Brodie was in civilian clothes—obvious reach-me-downs that made his powerful, stockish figure look like that of a tailor's dummy, but otherwise quiet and unoffending. His tie was aggressively sober. He wore brown boots that were a shade too bright. Everything was new—horribly new. The last semblance of the officer and the gentleman had gone under in all that newness. His face was lined and sallow.

Wild, uncontrollable thoughts ran through the Seton family. This was a little tradesman in his Sunday best, all spruced up after a Saturday night's spree. This was not Ursula's husband.

Mrs. Seton moved first. She came to him quickly,

impulsively, as though to shield him, standing between him and the others. Her hand rested on his own with a timid affection.

"Why, Adam, I'm so glad. It makes me feel that the war is really over."

A few weeks earlier and the gesture, her voice, the expression of personal feeling would have made him happy. But now he was hardly aware of her. Very gently he released himself from her hand.

"Wait a moment, Mrs. Seton." He looked towards her husband, as though his business was exclusively with him. "I expect Margaret will have told you about last night," he said. "She was kind enough to ask me to go out with her and I was fool enough to accept. Because I see now that I don't know how to behave. I got drunk and disgraced myself and Margaret. The first thing I want to do is to apologise to her. I realise that I placed her in a most shameful position."

He was so intent on what he had set himself to say that he saw no one distinctly. They were just so many blurred figures. Then it was as though someone struck him across the face. He heard Margaret laugh.

"How dear and noble of you, Adam. But you didn't really think I would let you bear the burden of my wickedness, did you? Why, I got up early on purpose to tell them how splendid you had been, how you trampled on the head of the serpent and rescued a would-be Delilah from her own toils. It made quite a thrilling story, didn't it, Ursula?"

The mist cleared a little. He saw Margaret's eyes smiling at him with their aloof amusement. For one moment he suspected her of having tricked him into another melodramatic and ridiculous pose. But her ex-

pression changed. "My dear Adam," she said coldly, "there are things I do not do."

He was silent, considering her intently. He saw her from an astonishing and bewildering angle. It was his first perception of the power of tradition working faithfully amidst weeds and ruins, and afterwards he was to remember it many times. But it did not change his purpose.

"It's good of you to take the blame, Margaret," he said at last. "But the fact remains. I had no business there last night. I've been thinking it over. I've no business here either. I'm not a gentleman. I don't belong to your kind. I don't know how to behave amongst you. I can fight amongst you all right, but living is different. I've tried hard and you've tried hard, but I've made you wretched and I've been going to bits. I'm losing my self-respect. In a few months I'd be sponging on you—and—and drinking. I'd be a good-for-nothing cad." He paused and then added deliberately, "So I'm going home."

Mrs. Seton turned flutteringly to her husband. She was dazed and frightened. For the first time since her son's death life was again striking hard at her with its brutal realities. And her denial of them was weakening. Mr. Seton took her hand and patted it reassuringly. But he himself had begun to tremble.

"I don't quite understand, my dear fellow."

"I mean," said Adam Brodie, "that I'm going back to my people. To the shop. I 'phoned them this morning. My father's willing. I've got my job."

He did not look at Ursula. He was keeping her out of his thoughts.

Mr. Seton went on patting his wife's hand. It was not a question now of likes or dislikes or of sor-

row or happiness. Actual shipwreck was staring them in the face.

"My dear Adam, in a way we understand your feelings. Personally I respect you for them. If anyone is to blame for the—eh—mistakes of the last months it is not you. Perhaps we have been lacking in consideration and understanding. Certainly one member of my family has behaved in a way that fills me with the deepest shame. But—but surely this step of yours is too drastic. There are other openings for a brave and capable man. Ursula and I were actually discussing them. In the Colonies, for instance. Deeply though it would grieve us——"

Brodie took a step forward. He had flushed up violently. His whole personality had suddenly taken fire.

"I'm not going to leave England," he said. "I belong here just as much as you do, Mr. Seton. I'm needed here. Every man who cares for his country and can and will do a decent day's work is needed."

"But surely as—as a shopkeeper," Mr. Seton stammered out in sheer panic.

"Honest grocers are not so plentiful," Brodie retorted. He gave an involuntary, unhappy laugh. "And p'raps that's all I'm good for. Anyhow, I'll stay here. I'm damned if I'll be kicked out."

"And Ursula?" Mrs. Seton whispered.

He had to think of her now. He grew very white again. That treacherous mouth betrayed him.

"It's not for me to answer you, Mrs. Seton. If Ursula was the same sort as I was—if she were a tradesman's daughter, why then I'd know. I'd be able to count on her. What was good enough for me would be good enough for my wife. But it's different. I

haven't any claim—no right——” He looked at her now. It was all very well making up one's mind. But he was going to lose her and there was nothing in the world worth while.

She met his eyes. Whatever else had changed, they were those of the man she had loved in Fontainebleau—vividly blue, intense and visionary, with that vague, haunting look of a seeking, doubtful child.

“Do you want me, Adam?”

He tried to answer. He had been prepared for everything but this. He could not believe what he saw. He did not know that ever since he came into the room she had been trembling on the verge of this headlong reaction.

She stamped her foot at him. “What right have you to say that I am different, or that what is good enough for you isn't good enough for me? Weren't we out there together? Didn't I see it through with you? Did I ever ask to be let off lightly? You talk of me as though I were a pampered princess, as though I were a coward.”

“No, no, Ursula. By God, I don't——”

“You've tried to live with us,” she went on rapidly, “and we've made you miserable. We've been beastly—hateful. Now I'm going to live with you. I'm going away with you. I don't care where I go. I don't care whether I ever see my own people again. I'm going to sell your biscuits behind your counter. I'm going to be your wife and nothing else. Will you take me?”

“No,” he said between his teeth.

The rest were forgotten. Nothing could have revealed the stress under which they laboured more painfully than this utter oblivion.

“Do you think I'm not as good as women of your

sort?" she stammered on. "Not as good as a tradesman's daughter—that I can't love you as much? Is that what you meant?"

"I've got to do what seems right to me," he answered, with a blind stubbornness.

For one moment longer they held their ground, facing one another. There was something cruel and yet exultant in their attitude, as though they were being driven together by a primitive force that made mock of their resistance.

"Do you want me?" she flung at him again.

"Yes," he answered recklessly. "I can't live without you."

CHAPTER XIII

1

SO Ursula went to her husband's people.

The first evening remained ever after in her memory as something as fantastic as a fairy tale. No one seemed real. She was not real to herself and, when she stopped for a moment to think, she had a terrible desire to laugh, or to get up and run away.

Clara Brodie opened the side door to them. They had come in a taxi, and Adam remained behind to help an unwilling driver bump their luggage down the narrow passage. Clara went on ahead. She had shaken hands with Ursula and her hand felt limp and moist. She held open a door, letting Ursula pass in front of her into the sitting-room.

It was small and square. The table with the lamp and the maroon coloured cloth and the side-board occupied so much space that the chairs had to keep their exact position, and even then one had to manoeuvre sideways among them. There was one armchair drawn up under the light and a tattered number of Sexton Blake's adventures lay on the table, held open by a pair of spectacles. Even here there was a faint chuffy odour of stale biscuits.

Mr. Brodie stood opposite her. He was in his very best, though Ursula did not know it, and so trembling with shyness that he could not speak. He looked much older than the little man who had thanked her that

murky November evening for her memories of his lost son. The fluffy white hair stood out more untidily than ever and his face had grown smaller. But the eyes were still those of Adam Brodie, vividly blue with that expression of gazing wistfully into a far distance.

Mrs. Brodie was there, too. She had not changed at all, for change was not in her. She put her cool big face against Ursula's.

"I'm sure you're very welcome," she said.

Mr. Brodie did not kiss her. He held her hand, patting it gently, and looking up at her.

"Very welcome indeed, 'ma'am, very welcome."

There were tears in his eyes now, so that suddenly Ursula's heart grew hot and big within her, and she had an absurd feeling that she would like to put her arms round him and cry with him over the whole inexplicableness of life.

"I'm sure Ursula wishes us to call her by her Christian name," Mrs. Brodie said. "Seeing that she's married our son it is only right and proper."

"I never thought of anything else," Ursula said.

"Ursula, then, Ursula," Mr. Brodie murmured. "Such a pretty name."

"I never heard tell of it before," Clara Brodie muttered.

It was she who took Ursula up to her bedroom. Ursula had slept in many strange places, on sacking under the leaking roof of a shell shattered French chateau, on a steamer deck with a channel gale blowing about her ears, and once in a dank cellar with Adam Brodie's head against her shoulder. But this room was stranger to her than all of them. The hardship of all adventure was familiar to her caste and blood, but not the sparse comfort of a lower middle-class poverty.

By the dimly burning gas jet the furniture loomed about her like stiff, unfriendly shadows—a chest of drawers, a tiny wash stand, a dressing table, whose glass could not be kept from swinging drunkenly save by wedges of paper, a sombre double bed covered with a dingy quilt and guarded on either side by chairs. Ursula nailed her sinking colours to the mast.

Clara brought her a jug of hot water which she placed in the basin, covering it with a towel. Everything she did was done noisily, contemptuously, as though she were pandering to a spoilt and unreasonable interloper. She ignored Ursula's thanks.

"When you've finished you'd better come down," she said ungraciously. "Supper'll be ready."

Supper consisted of cold beef and pickles and cheese. It was a Sunday supper introduced into a weekday in Ursula's honour, though that also she did not know. Adam sat beside her. He seemed to her more ill at ease than she was herself. He waited on the three women and Clara nudged him, bringing a sudden flush to his set face.

"Grown quite the gentleman, aren't you, Addy?"

He did not answer, and Mr. Brodie broke in nervously with some more talk about the business.

"Not that it's fair to worry you with the shop, ma'am," he apologised. "It ain't very interesting to ladies."

"It's interesting to me now," Ursula said gravely.

"Better she should begin as she's got to go on," Mrs. Brodie remarked. "It's her affair as much as ours."

Her manner was stolid and impartial. Clara tittered disagreeably.

No mention was made of that first meeting and

Ursula understood that it was to be passed over as something not quite to her credit.

After supper Ursula, in spite of Mr. Brodie's timid remonstrances, helped to clear away and wash up. She was as practised as either of the two women and by nature more deft, and she felt Mrs. Brodie's grim but not unjust scrutiny follow her with approval. But her quickness seemed to inflame Clara Brodie's unveiled dislike.

"Nowadays ladies can do anything," she said.

When they came back to the sitting room the two men were smoking quietly together. Ursula came and stood for a moment at her husband's shoulder, and with an effort that she felt he held up his cigarette case to her. She closed it quietly and she knew that he was thankful to her; but she was ashamed for both of them. It was as though they had lied—meanly and weakly, not to spare others, but to spare themselves.

The two women sat on opposite sides of the table on the stiff-backed chairs with their hands folded in their laps. They did nothing, but stared heavily in front of them, only now and then throwing out some desultory sluggish comment on the day's doings. It was, as Ursula was to discover, their manner of celebrating some special event. But once she looked up and caught Clara Brodie's eyes fixed on her, sullen and distrustful.

As early as she dared, she went up to their room. She had no heart to unpack, no heart to undress. She stood in the middle of the floor, as though she were trying to escape the clutch of the unfriendly ugly furniture. She felt utterly lost and forlorn in a strange country where no one spoke her language. Not since her first school-days had she known such homesickness.

Then the door opened and closed quickly. It seemed to shut out the world, to enclose them in an absolute and perfect intimacy.

"It won't be always like this," he stammered to her. "I'll get out somewhere; only—stand by me a while longer——"

And so they clung to one another. There was now an element of tragic violence in their embraces, as though by sheer force and fire they could destroy the thing between them.

But in the morning she awoke first and, going softly to the window, drew up the blind. It was raining and beneath her was a squalid yard and all around mean roofs and tumbling chimney pots. Adam Brodie did not wake. She came back and stood looking down at him. His closed eyes left nothing but that look of stubborn courage.

She made a smothered sound and his eyes opened, meeting hers with a strange directness, as though she had called to him in distress and he had answered. She knelt down, hiding herself against his breast.

2

That same day three people made a secret pilgrimage to the store room where the Brodies kept their reserve stock of non-perishable goods. It was a stuffy, unromantic attic, depressingly lit by a smoke-shrouded skylight. Nevertheless, it had been the conveniently shifting background to young Brodie's most lurid adventures. It had been a robber's den, a dungeon, a mountain fastness and even a gilded chamber in Buckingham Palace where, according to youthful fancy, the King was wont to decorate his heroes. Here also Brodie

had smoked his first cigarette and dreamed his first day-dream of someone who was not Clara nor yet the chemist's daughter nor anyone whom he had ever seen.

He had never dreamed that one day he would summon his mother here to tell her that, after all, his home wasn't good enough.

But there she was, breathing heavily after the stiff climb, and Mr. Brodie sat opposite her on an empty soap box. He was wearing his best coat and a grave, rather awed expression, as though he were in church. A laughable little scene, but Adam could only think of Ursula's eyes as he had seen them in that first moment of waking.

He himself stood square and stockish with his back to the sloping sky-light.

"It seems sort of strange to have to come up here to talk," he began abruptly, "but that's what's the matter. There isn't anywhere to go. We're all jumbled up together. We can't get away from one another, except like this. There isn't room." He took a deep breath, steadying himself. He was like an inexperienced doctor, hurrying on an operation just because he is afraid. "That's what I want to talk about," he said.

Mrs. Brodie considered him expressionlessly.

"There's no call to get away from one another," she said. "We're honest people and we don't need to hide in corners to say what we have to say. I've never done it and I don't like it, Adam."

"It's a little place, true enough," Mr. Brodie murmured. "P'raps now you've come back we'll be able to extend a bit, Addy. You know, we were always talking about how one day we'd take Perkins' shop and make a real slap-up business of it. And I 'ave heard that Perkins is thinking of selling out." He became

suddenly possessed of a birdlike eagerness. A little old ambition, badly battered by time, which he had kept warm and secret in his heart, leapt out joyfully. "There's no saying what we won't do, now Addy's back," he said proudly.

Adam Brodie turned for a moment from his purpose. He remembered how he, too, had dreamed that "Thomas Brodie and Son" would grow and flourish till its luxuriant branches should spread over the whole district, perhaps even into the West End. He had imagined its smart delivery vans in the best streets. In more exalted moments the little shop became a national institution. It had all been very boyish—an ambition that had managed somehow to live peacefully side by side with wild adventure and the vision of the Unknown Beloved in the lawless land of his imagination. But now things were actual. Life had been far more wonderful, far more incredible than any dream he had ever dreamed in the shabby attic. There was a thwarted force and power in him that made the lifting of "Thomas Brodie and Son" into the region of big enterprise seem, by comparison with all that had gone before, a little task. And yet the thought chilled him. He did not seem able to care. It was like coming back to a boyhood's treasure and finding it incredibly small and tarnished.

"Of course we're going to do big things together, dad," he said at last. "I'm going to put my back into it. You'll see. But I wasn't thinking of the business, nor yet of myself exactly. It's Ursula I'm worrying about."

He saw his mother's lips tighten.

"It's early for her to begin complaining," she said.

"Mother, she's not complained. She never will.

She'll drop dead first. She's that sort. And just because of that I've got to feel for her so's to know where things hurt, and I've seen that it won't do. There isn't room for her."

He began to pace up and down between the boxes. He had seen how his father drooped, all the bird-like brightness gone out of him. He felt cruel and despicable. They too had their ambition, their pride. It was as though he had come back only to push the old things aside, saying, "They're not good enough anymore."

"You see, she's left everything for me," he went on. "She's given up her people, given them up as completely as though she were going into a foreign country where she'll never see them again. Given up her money and her comfort and all she's been accustomed to ever since she was a kid. A clean sweep of everything, just so as she could be my wife. That's fine, isn't it? And she's as brave as can be. She'll go through with it. P'raps you don't know what that means. I wouldn't if I hadn't lived her life for a bit. But I do know—and I'm going to make things easy—as easy as I can. I've got to make a home for her."

He waited for them to speak—waited for his mother to speak. A child's fear lasts to the end of life and he was afraid of that stout rigid figure.

"You don't seem to think of anything but making that girl happy," Mrs. Brodie said. "It isn't right, Adam. It isn't Christian."

"I don't care for anything else," he answered. And then a great wave of emotion engulfed him. From every corner of the dingy attic his boy's dreams came back to him in all their fresh, vague beauty and enchantment. They had been dreams. If he had known

in those days that they were shadows of reality he would not have known how to thank God. And being a man changed nothing. The exalted, romantic boy was there still, on his knees, in all the humble pride and gratitude of love. "Mother, she's a sort of miracle to me. I don't know how anything so wonderful could have happened to me. If I can make her happy, make up to her for what she's given me, nothing else matters."

It sounded poor and thin. It was like taking a precious metal from a dark hiding place into the sunlight and seeing it turn to tinsel.

"That's blasphemous, Adam," Mrs. Brodie said. "I don't hold with that sort of talk. You'd better say straight out what you've got to say and get it over."

Mr. Brodie, who had been sitting with his eyes on the dusty floor, looked up.

"I know what Addy means, mother," he said. "He don't mean anything wrong or unkind. And Ursula's a good girl. She's not our sort and it comes hard on her to live in our ways. We must all try to make it easier for her. I've been thinking—there's a little house to let in Montgomery Street. 'The Firs,' they call it, for thirty pounds a year, so I've heard. If you're sharp, Addy, you may get it before the landlord thinks of raising the rent again."

Brodie looked quickly at his mother. Her big hands were clenched on her stout knees. She was white as marble.

"And where's the money coming from to pay for it and furnish it?" she demanded. "Or perhaps Adam's wife will pay. She's a grand lady. She'll have money, no doubt. It's just a game, her coming here—'slum-

ming,' no doubt she calls it. He'll be living on her yet."

Brodie interrupted sternly.

"She's as poor as I am, mother. I told you, she's cut herself from everything for my sake."

Mrs. Brodie gave a short, hard laugh.

"There isn't any such thing as cutting yourself off from what you are. She's got her people to go back to and she knows it. It's all play-acting. I don't hold with it."

There was a brief, unhappy silence.

"P'raps we could raise a bit on the business," Mr. Brodie said, half to himself. "P'raps the bank would lend it us."

Mrs. Brodie lifted her heavy, inflexible body to its feet.

"We've moiled and toiled," she said loudly and unsteadily. "We've had our bad times and we've kept clear of debt through it all. And now because Adam's a fool and has made a fool's marriage, we're to be ruined and disgraced."

"I've moiled too," Mr. Brodie said gently, "and it's all been of no good if it doesn't make Addy happy."

He met his wife's eyes mildly but steadily, and suddenly her anger dropped. It was as though she knew that at last she was fighting something that was too strong for her. Adam had never seen his mother yield. He had never known how tragic her indomitable figure would look in resignation. She seemed to him sadder even than his father, because one could not love or pity her.

"Mother," he said brokenly, "if you'll do this for me—for Ursula—I'll pay it back. I'll make good. You'll never regret it."

But she shook her head, drawing away from him.

"It's God's will," she said. "I've been too set-up, it's a punishment."

3

So "The Firs" was to be their home.

It was a tiny gabled villa in a row of villas which Ursula remembered from that first drear November evening. Then she had seen them in a wistful, tender light as belonging to Adam's childhood, to a past that was wonderful because it had been the stepping-stone to something infinitely finer, and because it could never come back. The little houses had not been quite real to her. It was like seeing a place that one has read of in a story book.

But "The Firs" was real—not grimly so, but just meanly and inconveniently real. Ursula, who could have faced the honest horrors of a dungeon unflinchingly, felt her heart grow leaden as she inspected the dingy, frowsty little rooms which would always be dingy and frowsty, no matter how one scrubbed or how wide the windows were left open. They made her doubt her own strength.

There was only one thing they offered—escape from Clara Brodie's inexplicable hostility. For Clara, who scarcely spoke to her and was incapable of subtlety, had yet made Ursula understand that for the Brodie family she was little less than a disaster.

Mr. Brodie and his son sat deep into the night over the account books, and the next day the old man went slowly and heavy-footed to his bank. He was there some time. The same afternoon Adam put ten five-pound notes into Ursula's hands.

"It's for making the home," he said. "I want you to do it all by yourself, little wife, so that it'll be just as you like."

He spoke tenderly but gravely. To Ursula his manner and the fifty pounds were slightly comic in their lack of proportion and, in one of those cruel impulses which assailed her more and more frequently, she longed to tell him so. She hated to be called "little wife." She was exasperated by the insidious flavour of stale biscuits which invaded every corner of the shabby house and Clara's undignified and aggressive sulkiness. She hated the money. It is one thing to surrender your environment for love, it is another to be told to go out and buy it for fifty pounds. Then she met Adam's eyes and her heart swung back in its habitual reaction. She took herself firmly in hand. If she had lost her home, Adam should have his. And as for herself, well, thank God, it was not in him to understand.

So she appealed with a show of daughterly deference to Mrs. Brodie. "You know his tastes better than I do," she said. And Mrs. Brodie, giving no sign of approval, nevertheless rose heavily to the occasion. She contributed from her own household a bed, a couple of odd chairs, a lurid imitation Turkey carpet, which had been her secret pride, various pots and pans, and the remnants of an old tea set. The gifts were necessary, for the fifty pounds were even more ludicrously inadequate than Ursula had supposed them to be. In the reaches of the Tottenham Court Road, where she and Mrs. Brodie shopped together in frigid amity, she became for the first time involved in the grey struggle which the majority of her countrymen were making for existence. Yes, the Setons had economised, they had

"gone without," they had kept loyally within their rations, they had known of the madly soaring prices. But the decencies of life had been theirs without question and without effort. It was a new thing for Ursula to realise that decency was not inevitable—that it had to be paid for and that the price was almost beyond her reach.

She started out, strong in her native courage. She was going to make the best of things and, if she could, discover their beauty. Life, after all, was an adventure or it was nothing, and adventure involved adapting oneself bravely to every unfamiliar circumstance. But in two days she began to flag. The crowd sapped her vitality. She struggled with it for her place in the densely packed busses and tubes; she jostled through it on the packed pavements, she ate in its midst and competed against it in the stifling shops. It engulfed her. She felt its weariness, its baffled unrest and drab disillusionment creep like a poison into her blood.

The war for Ursula Seton had been a noble, terrible necessity. With all her race, she had seen the issue clearly from the first, and no loss or horror had dimmed her vision. But in these days in the Tottenham Court Road she lost grip, she began to question where there could be no answer. Would men and women have been so willing to suffer if they had known that life was going to be like this? Would they have fought as they had done if they had known that their victory was going to be sucked dry by politicians and profiteers? Would they have given their lives so gladly for England if they had known of the greedy, senseless hands waiting to tear down her greatness and prosperity as soon as they were gone? Wasn't the whole

thing a nightmare of cheated idealism, and wasn't her life and romance part of it?

She did not know. She was down in the arena now, and the dust and turmoil blinded her so that she could not see.

And it was a strange thing that the Ursula, who in the melting pot of war had loved the simplest, roughest soldier as her brother, began to hate the mass of her fellow-creatures. They became the "mob" for her, and she shrank from them into a spiritual aloofness.

She hated them for their uncouth blindness, for their selfish recklessness, for their innate vulgarity of soul, but above all because they had invaded the privacy of her life. They brought with them the horror of horse-hair chairs and imitation Turkey carpets and a Marcus Stone print, "The Lovers' Quarrel," Adam's favourite picture, Mrs. Brodie said, which was to hang for ever and for ever above her mantelpiece.

4

Between them Brodie and his father put up the shutters. By the light of the solitary gas-jet the tiers of biscuit-tins and the rotund shadow of the big apple barrel—Thomas Brodie and Son made a specialty of apples—had a softened, mysterious look. It was the hour Brodie had always loved best in the little shop. He had liked the feeling of shutting out the melancholy twilight and the chattering customers and of being alone with the humble, wonderful travellers, some of whom had come to "Thomas Brodie and Son" from the other ends of the earth. The figs and dates and prunes and raisins were no longer mere commodities for sale. They were the creatures of romance. It had been easy for young Brodie to imagine the tales they could tell him.

Even now he moved quietly, locking the cash-box and putting away the ledger noiselessly as though not to disturb the friendly spirits of the place. He saw his father standing like a small ghost by the counter, watching him. Brodie took down his cap and overcoat.

"Well, I'll be off now, dad."

"That's right, Addy."

They went out together into the narrow passage which led to the side door. In the darkness they stood close to one another.

"You'll say 'good night' to mother and Clara for me, won't you, dad? I'd like to get off quickly."

"Of course I will, Addy. Your first night in the new home. She'll be waiting for you. They'll understand." He groped for his son's hand and held it strongly. "Give your dear wife our love, Addy."

"Thank you, dad."

"I can remember how she was that evening," Mr. Brodie went on, in a small, far-off voice. "Armistice evening. No, I won't ever forget that. I'd been thinking of you all day, not knowing how to live. Then she came in, pretending to be a customer, all to pieces, poor thing, and trying to buy sugar without a card. Such a lovely young lady. When she began to tell us that she knew you, why I saw how it was. I couldn't know she was your wife. But I did know she loved you, and I was that proud that such a good, sweet lady could love my boy, my poor dead boy, as I thought then, I felt like I could have cried."

Brodie unlatched the door and let the damp evening air blow against his hot face.

"It's wonderful for me. But it's mighty hard on her. I didn't know how hard it was going to be. If I had I couldn't have made such a fight to get back."

"You musn't say that, Addy. Life's hard for us all these days. Sometimes I'm glad I'm an old man. When I was a boy there was gentlemen and common people and one knew where one was. No one seems to know what they are now."

"I don't know," Brodie muttered.

The hand tightened on his.

"My boy's a gentleman. He'll come through as a gentleman should."

Brodie bent and kissed his father's cheek. They had not kissed each other for so many years that he was ashamed and awkward and hurried out into the street without even a "good night."

But suddenly he was very happy. He could not wait. "The Firs" was just round the corner at the end of Edgberton Street and Adam Brodie ran like a boy. The neighbours' shops were closed, so that there was no one to see him. But if the street had been crowded he would not have cared.

It was like an answering signal. Before his key had turned in the lock she was at the door and held it wide open for him with a grand gesture of welcome.

"Home at last, Major Brodie!"

He came in, laughing and breathless, queerly exultant. The tight, stilted middle-classness which had come over him since his return had gone as though he had stripped it off in that headlong race and become again the free and happy soldier.

And she too had never seemed more splendidly living. The narrow, stuffy hall was bright with her. She shone with the pride and joy of life which in her was more than beauty. The gas-lamp, burning behind her head, made an aureole of her ruddy hair.

She did not wait for him. In deep seriousness she put her arms about him and held him close to her.

"You're home now, Adam."

He had imagined this happiness too often not to fear it. He took her face between his hands. He had been thinking of Fontainebleau and of how they had clung to one another then, just as they did now, holding back the inevitable march of life. With his poignant memory of those last minutes he could see the change in her. The face was thinner, something too resolute, too burning, too finely drawn. And as though his scrutiny troubled her, she shook herself free, laughing.

"You musn't look at me like that!" she said. "I don't bear close inspection. I'm getting old and battered."

"I was thinking how—how tired you are," he stammered. "I've left all the work to you. I meant it so that you could fix things as you liked. But it's been too much for you."

"You must see what I've done," she answered. She took him half solemnly, half gaily by the hand. "Just so that you shan't lose yourself."

He had not been inside "The Firs" since the day when they had gone through it under the threatening and contemptuous auspices of the house agent. He had wanted her to be free. At the bottom of his heart was the sad knowledge that he was a clumsy, common fellow, who could only trammel her elusive sense of beauty.

The hall smelt faintly of new linoleum and preparing food. The little dining room was a replica of every little dining room in Montgomery Street. The square table, the two comfortless arm-chairs flanking the fireplace, the mean fire in the mean grate, the fumed

oak sideboard with its cruet-stand, the photographs on the mantleshef and the two cheap bronzes of eternally rearing horses were as inevitable as the paraphernalia of an orthodox church. They were, in fact, the symbols of a common faith, a common ideal. Some of the things Brodie recognised.

It was his home she had prepared for him.

In the spacious, casual beauty of the Setons' house he had often thought tenderly of just such a place as this, where a man could be at ease, could toast his slippers before the fire or lounge in his oldest coat and smoke his pipe among familiar, friendly things. There, he had thought, he would be himself again.

It was queer that he should feel this chill, this sudden heart-sinking.

"Adam, this is the first time we've ever been really alone together."

He answered with a kind of defiance.

"We haven't had a chance till now. There's always been people and—and things between us. Now it's going to be different. We're going to start afresh."

"Yes," she said soberly.

He put his arm about her.

"It's a little place. You won't mind for a bit? Perhaps quite soon we'll be able to have something better. I'm going to work hard. P'raps in a year or two 'Thomas Brodie and Son' will be a sort of Whitelys. It won't be my fault if it isn't."

She shook her head.

"I don't want it, Adam. We've tried big things and we nearly lost each other. Let's stay like this."

They had to go single file up the narrow stairs. Their bedroom was just as his mother believed a bedroom should be. There was a spare-room, too, in which all

the odd, left-over pieces of furniture and crockery had been jumbled together.

The inspection was over. They went back to the dining-room and stood side by side before the fire in silence. Brodie could not speak. His throat hurt him. It was as though he had witnessed something infinitely pathetic.

"You're not disappointed, are you, Adam?"

"You've been too good to me, Ursula. That's all. You're too good for me. I'm not fit, I'm not worth while."

Her hand closed over his. He looked at it as if for the first time and saw how white and slender her hand was.

"You're worth more than I can do. You've had such a bad time, out there, and then among my people. I've been thinking about it all. There's nothing I wouldn't do to make you happy."

"You've had a bad time, too," he said.

And all at once a question that had been working its way out of the depths of his subconsciousness forced itself to the surface.

"Somehow, I thought you'd have—some of your own things about, the things you're so fond of—your books and pictures."

There was a silence. He did not look at her, but he knew that she was finding it hard to answer, that she was trying to say something painful in a way that should not hurt him. When she spoke at last her voice was cheerful and careless.

"Why, no, they wouldn't have fitted in, not with the other things, you know."

"I wanted you to have them."

She met him steadily. Her eyes, he thought, were

good to look into. Their grey steadfastness gave one a sense of security that their hint of passion could not trouble. Great storms might come, but there would be certain high places of sanctuary in Ursula's character which one could always count on.

"I don't want them," she said lightly. "Let the old things go." She turned away. "I'll get supper now. Light the ceremonial pipe, Adam."

He heard her singing to herself in her little kitchen. Somehow he could not do as she told him. He looked up at the "Lovers' Quarrel" with its unreal sweetness. Everything had been for him. She had shut herself out. The things she loved could never live with the things he loved, there could be no compromise between them. And so her things had gone. They were not to speak a common language. She was learning to speak his, to be his wife.

"Adam, if you want to be useful you can come and fetch the tray."

She was learning to be the little shop-keeper, the little suburban woman.

He cleared his throat desperately.

"All right, I'm coming, little wife."

CHAPTER XIV

1

ESMÉ MONTEITH unfastened the rusty, badly hinged gate and went up a three-foot path between a pair of stunted shrubs to which, presumably, "The Firs" owed its designation. The bell, hanging limply out of its socket, had an air of extreme discouragement and at first refused office. Finally and quite unexpectedly, however, as though exasperated beyond endurance by its tormentor's pertinacity, it gave vent to a scolding clamour at which, so it seemed to Monteith's whimsical fancy, all the little gabled houses pricked their ears.

Even then it was some time before the summons was answered. Monteith heard slow, yet in some expressive way, impatient steps come along the passage and the door opened a reluctant six inches.

"Is Mrs. Brodie at home?" Monteith asked.

She opened the door then to its fullest extent, but he could not be sure whether the movement was one of impulsive pleasure or of angry distress. It was like trying to read the expression of a complete stranger. As a matter of fact, he had not expected Ursula. The steps had not prepared him and, even now, he was shocked to an extent that required all his easy self-control to hide. "Aren't you pleased to see me?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "No, I don't think I am."

"I've come a long and perfectly beastly journey to see you," he returned unperturbed. "Can't I come in?"

She considered deliberately and unsmilingly. There was an unfamiliar heaviness in her white face that made it look almost sullen.

"I suppose so. You have such an extraordinary way of cropping up when no one expects you, Esmé. People don't as a rule call at ten o'clock in the morning. Not in this part of the world at any rate."

"That's exactly why I came," he said. "I should simply loath to do anything anybody did in this part of the world."

"That's not tactful," she remarked coldly.

"And it isn't kind of you to keep me standing outside," he retorted. "They'll take me for a rebuffed hawker, if there is such a thing. I can feel them peeping out from behind the curtains. They are, aren't they?"

Her eyes softened a little. They passed him to the opposite houses with a faint gleam of malicious pleasure.

"Of course they are. How clever of you. You might have lived here all your life."

"Intuition," he explained. "If I lived here for a week I'd be peeping from behind the curtains too—shooting from behind them probably."

She stood aside now to let him enter. In silence she led him to a door on the left hand side of the passage. She was rolling down the sleeves of her shirt blouse with an embarrassed haste.

"It's in an awful mess," she explained. "Somehow I get behind hand so easily. But it's your fault—coming like this." He made no answer. Perhaps the dining-room, thinly warmed by a wretched fire and littered with

the chill and greasy remnants of breakfast, stifled his good-natured banter. She seemed to take it so, for her brows darkened. "No one asked you to come," she said.

"I know that only too well, Ursula, but as I'm here couldn't you make the best of me for half an hour? I am not really a vulgar intruder."

She threw a look of despondent loathing at the breakfast table.

"All right. I might as well. When things get left till ten o'clock I'm like a lost soul. I don't care any more. I'm ready to go the whole way. Isn't it queer, Esmé? I used to think I was pretty good at this sort of thing. But I'm a rotten 'Hausfrau'—absolutely rotten and getting worse."

He removed the morning paper from one of the armchairs and sat down, holding out his cigarette case towards her. She eyed it eagerly and shook her head with a wry laugh.

"Don't tempt me. I haven't—not for months. I'd better not."

"May I then?"

"Of course. It's good just to see you."

He let the involuntary flash pass unnoticed. She watched him sit back with his graceful air of being inevitably superior to every situation. She saw his pleasant brown eyes travel deliberately from the "Lovers' Quarrel" to the sideboard and from the sideboard back to the rearing horses. Perhaps there was nothing in the world she hated more than those absurd ubiquitous animals and it would have been very easy to hate Esmé for that ironical scrutiny. She felt she ought to hate him. But he could do things, somehow, without offence. He seemed, in some mysterious way, to lift her

up beside him onto a far-removed mountain whence everything looked more or less amusing—never too tragic or too important.

"And so you live here, Ursula?"

"In this room," she assented grimly. "There is a drawing-room and sometimes when people call we use it. Not otherwise. One couldn't."

"Amusing people?"

"They would be if I didn't live among them. They don't come much now. They don't approve of me. They'd love me on the front page of the "Tatler," but here—no. I'm a sort of outcast. And anyhow we've nothing to say to one another."

"For two months?" he exclaimed half to himself.

"Two months to-morrow. How did you know?"

He smiled at her.

"I still keep my diary. Margaret failed me, of course, so I have to do my own spying. I'm rather good at it. And when the time comes and I'm needed, I pop up."

She returned his gaze steadily and significantly.

"I don't need you, Esmé. I don't need anybody."

"You say that because you're afraid of me."

She laughed a little.

"I've not come to being afraid yet."

"I can tell you what you're afraid of. You're afraid of everything that belonged to Ursula Seton."

"If you're going to talk like that, Esmé, I'd rather you went. It's no good. And I don't want to listen."

"It's too near the truth," he remarked. He smoked in silence for a minute and then went on with a touch of impatient feeling. "But I didn't come here to hurt you. I don't know why it is. Fate always seems to be forcing me into the part of a pestiferous villain who springs up at the psychological moment in the drama

to make his little bit of mischief. But I'm not really like that at all. I'm an everyday man who loves his friends—who is restlessly, tiresomely concerned in them. They're not many now and I want them to be happy. I can't go away leaving them like this."

"Are you thinking of me?" she asked.

"Of you and your people."

She put up her hands, sweeping the hair back from her forehead with a movement full of nervous exasperation.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, dont, Esmé. It's no good. It's ridiculous. I won't listen. Ten o'clock in the morning is too early to begin crying."

"You never used to cry, Ursula."

She laughed again.

"Oh, well, I do now. You should see me. I cry when the milk's late. I cry when an egg's bad—I cry for nothing at all. It's getting to be a sort of pastime."

"Well, you're not going to cry now." His tone was firm but friendly. He might have been speaking to a man comrade whose nerve had failed. In that moment Ursula could imagine him on the battlefield and the men who notoriously had been ready to follow his good-humoured superiority to the gates of hell. "You said just now you weren't afraid, dear," he went on, "but that's just what is the matter. You're so afraid you don't want to listen to me. But you've got to. Your father and mother are failing because of the stand you've taken. Your grandfather, too—though that perhaps is inevitable anyway. They don't complain. Perhaps they don't realise what it is that's killing them. But they're too old—they've lost too much already—and they don't understand. They can only see that you've thrown them out of your life as though they

were of no more account than a couple of rag dolls. They see you don't care."

"That's not true," she interrupted. "You know it isn't."

"I know it isn't—I happen to understand. You're funkng your hedges, Ursula. It's not your husband's fault. I'd like to blame Brodie—I do blame him for many things—but not for this. It's not his fault that this place is crowded with his atrocities rather than with your treasures. I daresay he'd live in a Roger Fry dining-room if he thought it would make you happy. He'd be delighted to welcome your father and mother every time they liked to drop in for a bit of supper. But you won't. You haven't the pluck. And you used to be the pluckiest thing on earth."

He saw her face grow pinched and white. She looked beaten in that moment and he turned away from her, exclaiming under his breath, "Ursula! Ursula!" in a kind of bitter protest.

He went over to the window and stood there staring out onto the neat depressing street. With his peculiar faculty of detachment even in times of stress, he noted the frustrated trees, the mean little gardens with their everlasting shrubs that were only everlasting in their drab lifelessness. Across the way were other villas that could only have been turned out by machinery—so perfectly were they standardised. And the people in them were standardised too, he thought, neatly patterned and fitted up with small souls and small minds so that they should be able to endure without revolt or madness. He could smell the food preparing, and the pungent odour of babies not too scrupulously clean.

"My God, Ursula, I'm a beast to criticise you!"

"You understand terribly," she answered in a low, quiet voice that did not mislead him. "I wish you hadn't come. Is it any good forcing oneself to ride straight when one's nerve's gone? Doesn't it always end in breaking one's neck? Esmé, if it were dire poverty—you know, awful, staring poverty—the sort of thing one reads of in Russian novels—I could stand it. There would be a sort of dignity about it, like war. It would be a fight and there'd be no pretence. I think if I lived in a hovel stuck in a swamp out of which we were trying to eke a living I'd be all right. I could go home from time to time and be glad to sleep in a comfortable bed and eat good food and be among beautiful things. I'd look forward to seeing father and mother. I'd be up against real life and I'd be real, too. But this isn't real. You see, I've got a roof over my head, I've got easy chairs and carpets and good beds and— and pictures on the walls and enough to eat. I don't have to work hard. If I wanted to I could get my work done by eleven o'clock and read the paper till six. I'm comfortable. I'm not suffering. You couldn't call it a life of hardship, could you? But oh, Esmé, this respectability—this respectability." She checked herself and then went on in the same stifled voice. "You're quite right. I haven't the pluck. If I even think of the old things I feel I shall run away."

He began to move restlessly about the room, picking up the books and knickknacks and considering them with an appearance of attention.

"And what does Brodie think, Ursula?"

"I don't know. We don't talk now. He's at the shop all day. He's working frightfully hard. He's got an idea of building up a huge business—like Whitely's. And sometimes I believe he'll do it. He's so strong

and stubborn. And then it'll be like this—only much bigger."

Monteith held a book open.

"'Ursula to Adam'," he read aloud. "Does he go in for this sort of stuff?"

"I gave it him—for a wedding present, Esmé—sometimes I find him reading it—he—he tries to talk about it—and it's so pathetic—so pitiful—I can't bear it—I shut him up."

Monteith threw the book down and came over to her, laying his hand on her shoulder.

"Steady, Ursula, steady. You're saying more than you want to say. Remember, it's going to come all right, somehow. I won't go away till it does."

"I—I didn't know you were going away."

"Of course you didn't. I'm trying for an exchange into an Indian regiment. England's no place for an Englishman these days. I daresay there'll be some scrapping out there sooner or later and I'll have a chance to put up a good fight for the Old Country." He smiled a little. "It's rather rough on those dead thousands of us, and worse still for those that are half alive to see our dear stay-at-homes raise up a worse tyranny than the one we fought against. Rather a bad joke on us, isn't it? Well, my sense of humour's blunted. I'm off."

She remembered something that her grandfather had said, "Monteith will go out and get himself killed in some silly frontier row and think he's done the only thing an English gentleman can do." But Esmé's thought was too near her own for her not to feel something that was more than sympathy—a kind of secret kinship.

"I wish you weren't going," she muttered. "Or I wish I were going too—out of it all."

He seemed not to have heard.

"But I'm going to see you happy first. We've got to think things out and we've got to have clear brains. I wonder when you were out last, Ursula."

She frowned dully.

"Out? What do you mean?"

"I mean—for a good tramp—in the good air."

"Sometimes I go down the High Street to the butcher's. There's nowhere else to go."

"Well, the leaves are beginning to turn in Richmond. At this very moment the sun must be coming out of the mist. I can fairly smell the keen air, can't you? What would you give for a hard gallop, Ursula?"

He saw the colour rush to her cheeks.

"I—I'd give my salvation, Esmé."

"You don't need to do that. I thought of it when I got up. So, on the chance, I went round and picked up your riding things and came on in the car. You can change at a wayside inn or at stables. You've only got to say the word."

She was on her feet now. It touched him more than her tears to see that she was trembling with excitement.

"But there's Adam—I've got to think of him—if I were to tell him—if he were to find out."

He considered her gravely. He recognised now a change in her that was deeper and more significant than anything he had feared.

"Of course you'll tell him, Ursula. Why shouldn't you? Why should he mind?"

She seemed to brood over the question.

"He won't mind—he'll be glad—only it'll hurt him." She lifted her head and her eyes were dangerous. "But I'm going," she said. "I've got to go—"

2

"Sir," Adam Brodie wrote, "we have received your price-lists and I am herewith enclosing our cheque for a further gross——"

He went on writing steadily until the letter was finished and folded in one of the new envelopes which bore the device "Thomas Brodie and Son, Family Grocers" neatly inscribed in the top left corner.

The shop was closed. A gas-jet which had been fixed over his private desk encircled him in a still pool of light, seeming to cut off from the faint movements overhead. The Brodie family had retired and he had the place to himself. He sat, rather crouched and awkward, like an intent boy. It was a good move that he was making—exciting even. Queer that there should be excitement in ordering tea and tinned goods from a stray wholesale dealer. But there it was. The incessant strikes had left a desperate shortage in the neighbourhood and though there was no thought of profiteering, still, the shop that was well stocked inevitably gathered renown and customers. It was another stone in the big edifice.

He sat back at last with his hands clinched on the desk and dreamed into the future. And when he had built up "Thomas Brodie and Son" till it had become a national institution he realised that he didn't care. He was very tired. The excitement ebbed and left him with a chill disillusion and weariness that was more than physical. He was going to get rich. He was sure of it. When it came to action, to dealing with men and affairs he had the so-called luck of all strong and resolute people. He was going to get rich. And getting rich, he saw in this night hour, was an anti-climax.

It seemed in some inexplicable way to deny everything that he had thought and felt in those four years of war.

Once upon a time he and his father had dreamed of making "Thomas Brodie and Son" big. But now his father was too old. In spite of that last flicker of ambition he did not really want anything but to be left alone in his little shop and trundle along in the old ways. And Brodie himself? Wealth meant another villa—much bigger and in a finer neighbourhood. It meant real Turkey carpets and perhaps the original of the "Lovers' Quarrel" instead of a cheap print. It meant getting to look like a successful man.

He had not seen his life like that in those four years. He had had a vision of himself as a fighter, fighting for a new earth, for an England that should be greater and finer than she had ever been. He had not thought it out because it seemed foolish to plan a life that might end in the next minute, but he had felt sure that if he came through, he would, in some way, continue a soldier with his comrades in this task to which the war was only a rough prologue.

Now he was going to get rich. Getting rich meant, after all, profiting at someone's expense. Even now, in the little transaction with the stray wholesaler, he was cutting out a struggling neighbour. He remembered how his Colonel had thrown up wealth and position rather than join forces with a profiteering father—a traitor to every ideal for which they had been prepared to sacrifice their lives.

There were the strikers—profiteers. Every day some group or other of men would throw down their tools, clamouring for a bigger share in the booty. They didn't care any more than the others that the England which a million men had died to save was rolling to ruin.

Brodie, the soldier, hated them. He hated them more than he had hated the Germans. There were times, when the whole country stood paralysed and helpless, when he would have rejoiced to have been ordered out with a machine-gun.

Well, Brodie the grocer was going to join them. He was out to get his bit too. That was the sum total of it all.

A door opened overhead. There was a moment's hesitating interval and then it closed again very gently and the treacherous top stair creaked under a cautious tread.

Brodie did not hear.

And Ursula? Money would make no difference. Money would not bridge the gulf between them. It wasn't the lack of it that was taking her away from him. It was something much more subtle than that—something he hadn't got.

He thought of her, brooding before the smoky little fire in the slovenly little house which she seemed no longer able to keep even clean. She was like a wild animal that in captivity loses its self-respect and native dignity. As a boy, imprisoned things had inspired him with an unreasoned distress, and later on they had seemed to him to symbolise the whole horror of human cruelty. And now he wanted to fling open the door for her and say, "Go—go and be free again."

And yet he couldn't give her up. It was stronger than selfishness. It was like an instinct—a blind obstinate faith.

The glass-panelled door leading from the shop into the living-room opened. He lifted his bowed head from his arms, but not quickly enough, and he gave a short embarrassed laugh.

"Hullo, Clara, you caught me that time! I was half asleep."

"I thought I heard something moving," she said vaguely. "I didn't know you were still here."

"I had letters to write."

He knew he had not deceived her. The light had been full on his face and her rather hard brown eyes saw everything. Still holding her candle she came and stood close at his elbow.

"Poor Addy, you do work that hard."

"Well I've got to get on."

"If you work yourself to the bone you won't satisfy her."

He was too startled for a moment to answer. It was as though she had read his thoughts. Then, looking up into her face, he saw the hatred almost with relief and knew that she had not understood.

"Please, Clara, don't say things like that."

"Well, it's hard not to—seeing you eat your poor heart out. But I won't if you don't want it."

He got up. He began to put his things away hurriedly.

"I must be getting home."

"Poor old Addy."

There was a look in her coarsely pretty face that he could not or would not read. It was pitying and faintly contemptuous, as though he were a blind fool—and something more than that.

He slipped into his coat and went out into the passage. She put her candle down and followed him.

"You'll shut up after me won't you, old girl?"

Her hand rested on his own. He had the door open now and the street lamp lit up her eyes. Her stammer was thick with excitement.

"Addy, if things go—go wrong—don't you forget—I don't bear you no grudge—I'm on your side—it ain't never too late to mend."

Then, just as she had done on that first night, she put her arms about his neck and kissed him, clinging to him.

He understood now. In sheer distress he tore himself roughly free from her. For a moment they remained staring at each other through the half darkness. He could hear her hard, sobbing breath. Then he went out, shutting the door sharply behind him.

3

Monteith stopped the car at the usual place in the quiet road. Montgomery Street was only ten minutes walk, but it lay in another district, and they were not likely to meet anyone who knew Ursula. Monteith had agreed to the arrangement because it was clear to him that Peckham was not the kind of neighbourhood to understand.

"It's over," Ursula said.

She stood on the pavement looking at the beautiful car and its driver with a pale wistfulness. It hurt him to see her. Each time it was the same. She started out joyfully and through the ride she was her old splendid, happy self. And then on the long drive home through the unlovely streets he had felt her grow limp beside him as though the life were ebbing out of her.

"This can't go on, Ursula," he said quietly. "We're getting to breaking point."

"I know," she said. "So this was the last time——"
He shook his head.

"That won't do either. These days we've been her you've been getting back your nerve. You

can't funk any more, my dear. Next time we're going to look things in the face."

He held her hand for a moment, steadying her with his confident eyes. She knew he loved her and wanted her. She knew also that he brought a chivalrous detachment to bear on their relations—a detachment that, much as he would dislike the word, might become self-abnegation. That and the sheer comfort of him made her reckless.

"You are the finest friend anyone ever had, Esmé," she said brokenly. "And I feel the meanest. It isn't fair to you."

"I play my own game in my own way," he said with his fine smile. "I shan't whine if I break my neck."

It was three o'clock. She had never been so late before and ran the rest of the way home. It was not till she reached the gate that she realised that someone was following her and turned to find Clara Brodie at her heels. Clara Brodie was not accustomed to running and she was out of breath; her black velvet hat with the pink velvet roses hung over on one side, letting down wisps of straight, untidy hair, and her florid cheeks had become faintly purple.

"I've been trying to catch you up," she gasped. "I want to speak to you."

She made Ursula think of an angry bull. Her eyes had the same dead, clouded look. She was trembling with excitement.

"I'm sorry you had to run so," Ursula said quietly. "I was late. Won't you come in?"

She led the way into the dining-room. It annoyed her to have to remember that though she had cleared away the breakfast things she had not had time to remove the cloth. She knew that Clara would see the

stains and the bread crumbs. The fire had gone out and the room was dark and already grey with a November twilight. Ursula offered an impatient apology "I'm afraid it's all in a horrid mess."

"Well, you can't do everything," Clara Brodie said. "You can't gad about all day with a gentleman friend and keep a house clean."

Ursula, who had been kneeling by the fireplace, thrusting paper and wood under the hot smouldering coal, got up sharply and faced Clara. Up to that moment Clara had hardly penetrated her consciousness save as an unfortunate and tiresome interruption. Now she recognised in her a critical significance. For days past she had been drifting towards a crisis, making it by a deliberate passivity, inevitable, and it had come upon her in this way.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You know all right what I mean. I'm not going to beat about the bush. Addy may be home any time and I'm going to get my say over first. I've been watching you. Three days this week you've gone with that fine gentleman friend of yours—from ten o'clock in the morning till as late as you had the nerve to leave it—not honest like, going from the door, but sneaking out of side streets."

Ursula interrupted her with a laugh that jarred on her own ears. It sounded vulgar—full of a mean anger. The something aloof and dispassionate which dwells apart in the innermost place of character and is the unchangeable "I" seemed to be watching her with a cool disgust.

"What a queer mind you have, Clara. I suppose it's the sort of mind that grows in this wretched, God-forsaken place."

"That's right, Mrs. Brodie. You show your colours. Now we know what your mind is like anyhow. That's what you think about Addy's home."

"Wait a moment, if you please. We'll keep to the main issue. What do you suppose I was doing with my—gentleman friend?"

"I don't know. Gadding, no doubt. I'm not saying what you've done. Just monkeying round—having a good time—getting it cheap. I know your sort—you fine ladies. You go as far as you dare without getting yourself into trouble. You don't go the whole hog—you haven't got the pluck—or the heart."

Ursula was silent. She was aghast now at the level to which she had brought herself. She had despised Clara, in so far as she had considered her at all, and now Clara seemed to her by comparison dignified and honest.

"I suppose," she began finally, "you wouldn't believe me if I told you that I had simply been riding with an old friend? I have always ridden and I had missed it so much—I can't see why you or anyone should resent it."

"Does Addy know?"

Ursula set her teeth. She was sick with humiliation.

"No," she said.

Clara Brodie shrugged her shoulders. Perhaps there was some latent chivalry in her after all. She made no comment.

"P'raps you'll say it's not my business," she said unevenly, "but it is my business. I've known Addy all my life. We played together when we was kids and I've loved him always. It was a sure thing that he'd marry me when the time came and we'd 'ave had the

shop and been happy. Oh, I'm not making out he cares now—I'm not such a fool. You've wiped me out all right. But that doesn't make no difference to me. I haven't changed. And I'm not going to stand by and see his whole life messed up by a thing like you. I—I'd kill you first."

Ursula wanted to laugh and could not. It was silly and melodramatic. And yet there was something tragic in the distraught face that stared at her through the dusk. Her own heart was leaden.

"What's the use of saying things like that, Clara? You know you wouldn't. I'm terribly sorry. I had never any idea that things had been like that. If I had I would have understood you better. But I don't see that any good can come of it now. What can I do?"

Clara Brodie came a step nearer to her.

"You can clear out. That's what you can do. It's what you want to do at the bottom. You hate us—us and our ways and the place we live in. It's all stuff and humbug your pretending to be one of us. It's playing as auntie says. P'raps you do it because you think you love Adam—but you don't do it half well enough. You're just breaking his heart. You aren't particularly happy either, I dare say. Well, why don't you go back to your people and give him a chance to get free and start again? Why don't you go where you belong? Haven't you pluck enough for that?"

In their absorption they had not heard the opening of the front door. They did not see Adam Brodie until he was well into the room. He seemed to rise up between them like a shadow. Clara drew back with a stifled gasp of "Oh, Addy!" but Ursula did not move or speak. She felt quite quiet as though everything were inevitable.

"I couldn't help hearing part of what you said, Clara," Brodie began in a low, hard voice. "You've been advising Ursula to leave me. I suppose I have a right to know why, and what it's all about. It's only fair."

Clara answered with an angry truculency. At least, Ursula thought, she had a sort of courage. She had done for herself in Adam's eyes and must have known it. But she was going down with her colours flying.

"I've been telling your wife what I think. I suppose I've got a right to do that too—you'll hate me for it but I'm not going to stand by and see you made a fool of."

"Clara has discovered that I have been deceiving you, Adam," Ursula interrupted calmly. "She found out that I have been out two and three times a week riding with Esmé. She thinks it discreditable—disloyal to you. That is the whole story."

She felt like a spectator of some drama. She wondered with a detached interest how the hero would act—how he was going to take it. Almost before she had finished speaking Brodie laughed.

"What a goose you are, Clara!" he said good-humouredly. "You've always got some bee in your bonnet. Of course I knew Ursula was going with Major Monteith. I was jolly glad—jolly glad. What you both want is a little light on the scene."

He struck a match and turned on the gas jet, but for some reason or other the match went out and he did not strike another.

Clara groped her way to the door. From there Ursula felt her look back, and she knew the look was full of bitter contempt and triumph. And suddenly she

ceased to be the spectator. Her detachment was stripped from her. She was raw—raw to the nerves.

They heard the outer door slam. They were standing close to one another and Ursula felt Adam's hand close upon her's gently and tenderly.

"It's all right, little wife. It's all right."

"Oh, for God's sake, Adam, don't call me 'little wife,' I can't bear it."

His hand dropped as though she had struck him.

"I'm sorry—I only meant it is all right. I understand absolutely. And I am—jolly glad. I've been worrying about you—cooped up in this beastly little house. I should have been so awfully—so much happier if I could have thought of you out of doors—having a good time."

Her eyes burnt with tears of pity and exasperation. She could not have told him the truth. In that moment she did not even know it.

"I can't think why I didn't tell you, Adam. It wasn't Esmé's fault. He thought you knew. I must have deceived you out of pure love of deceit. I'm a perfect beast. I seem to be going all to pieces."

He shook his head. His voice sounded flat with weariness.

"It's not your fault. You see—I've been thinking things over. You can't tear people up by the roots—the way we've been trying to do. They can't live. We've got to have a straight talk about it all, Ursula."

She turned away, with a brief, self-contemptuous laugh.

"I'll get supper in the meantime. I suppose I can still manage to do that for you—poor Adam."

4

It never came to a straight talk between them.

The next afternoon, whilst Brodie was checking up some accounts, the shop bell tinkled, and Esmé Monteith walked in. He had evidently been motoring, for the collar of his tweed overcoat was still turned up against a bitter wind. The two men shook hands courteously across the counter.

"I've come with bad news, Brodie," Monteith said. "Mrs. Seton is seriously ill. They sent me to fetch Ursula as quickly as I could. She's getting a few things together. I thought I'd run round and let you know."

"Thank you, Major," Brodie said.

He slipped off his apron. It was queer, Monteith thought, that a man could do a thing like that with a sort of dignity. He opened a door into the house and there was a hasty muttered confabulation. When he came out again he was in his hat and coat. "I'm ready, Major."

The two men went out together. It was only a short distance to Montgomery Street and they walked slowly, as though both were aware of an understanding that must be reached between them.

Monteith broke the silence.

"Ursula has told me about the riding business, Brodie," he said. "I know there is no reason for my butting in and explaining Ursula to you. But I'm an old friend. I'm fond of her. And it wasn't like her to do a thing like that."

"She's very unhappy," Brodie answered. "This life's killing her. That's what it is. I'm sorry Mrs. Seton's ill. I daresay she'll be all right when Ursula gets back."

So I'm almost glad it's happened this way." He paused and Monteith felt that this man beside him was waging a hard fight. "I know you're fond of Ursula, Major. To be honest I know you love her. I understand it all perfectly and I don't blame you. It's natural that you should. And I think she's fond of you—fonder than she used to be. You mustn't ever blame yourself. You haven't come between us. It's been the little things—the little stupid things that don't seem to matter till you're up against them. We didn't think of them enough." There was another stop and then he went on with greater firmness. "I want to tell you now that if ever Ursula comes to me and tells me that she wants to be free I will make it easy for her. I suppose you think I might as well do it now. But I can't. It wouldn't be right. I don't know whether I can explain what I mean. If I did that now it would be—sort of denying God without giving Him a chance to prove Himself—it would be saying that Ursula and I had made a mistake when we married each other. And we didn't—I know we didn't. It was the big side of us that chose. If we were wrong, then there isn't anything real at all—everything fine and good is just a bit of deception—no one could believe in anything—we should be of all men the most miserable."

Monteith was silent. He did not know what to say to a man who even unconsciously quoted the Bible and talked frankly of God and love. It embarrassed him. And yet he had an odd feeling of respect and liking for his companion. He recognised a subtle development in him. He had grown. He had lost his half assertive, half apologetic manner. He was not like the men of Monteith's world, but he carried himself with a certain familiar freedom and decision.

Brodie pushed open the gate and stood aside for Monteith to pass.

"So it's not just blind selfishness," he said. "It's because I love Ursula."

"I know that, Major," Monteith said.

They found Ursula waiting for them in the living-room. She was flushed and excited looking. There was something unnatural about her. She seemed on the verge of fever. Brodie went to her and took her hand for a moment in a firm, reassuring clasp, as though she were a friend.

"You'll be there in an hour," he said. "And your mother will get better as soon as you are home again. You mustn't worry."

He helped her. He was silent and efficient. She caught a glimpse of him that hurt her intolerably. He was the Brodie who had always known how to act quickly and well.

"You need only take what you want for to-night," he said. "I'll send the rest of your things on afterwards."

So that he knew she was never coming back.

The yellow twilight crept down upon them. Monteith had gone outside, leaving them alone and they could hear the smooth, powerful hum of his big car. It added to Ursula's sense of reckless, ruthless haste. She was being swept over a precipice. And she wanted to go—she wanted to get it over.

She put on her hat before the oval glass in the living-room. Her hands trembled wretchedly. She was not thinking of her mother. She was thinking to herself, "It's all over now—it's all over."

When she had finished she saw Adam Brodie standing against the fading light. He had been so silent

that she had forgotten him and the unexpected presence shocked her into an hysterical delusion. It seemed to her that after all he had been killed—that all the intervening life together had been a dream and that it was his ghost that stood there. She could not have believed that otherwise the black outline of a face could have reminded her so bitterly—could have been so significant. It was such a stubborn profile and yet it had, too, that queer, remembered look of faith, of indomitable seeking, of indescribable romance.

The hurrying tide let go its hold. For a moment she was in an eddy—wavering.

"Adam," she said, scarcely above her breath.

He turned at once.

"It's all right, Ursula," he said, "You must go now. You mustn't think of anything. We shall come through somehow."

He went out with her and helped her into the car and wrapped the rugs round her. A fog deepened the twilight and he stood beside her like a shadow.

She could not shake off the horrible conviction that he was dead.

Brodie went back into the house. The door had been left open and he found his mother in the living-room packing the nickel plated spoons and forks into an old suit case. It was almost dark now, but neither of them attempted to light the gas.

"Might as well take these things over with us," Mrs. Brodie said. "There's been a lot of burglaries, and you won't be wanting them here now."

"No," Adam said.

"You'll be back in your old room to-night, Addy."

She had never spoken to him like that before. It was almost as though she were afraid. He went over

to the mantelpiece and stood there with his head bowed upon his arms.

"I don't know, mother—where I'm going."

"But you'll want to be back in the shop to-morrow."

"I'm not needed any more," he said. "The business is on its feet again. If I went on—I'd have to do things you wouldn't want and that I don't want either. Clara can take my place. She'll do better than I could."

"Aren't you coming back, Addy?"

"No, mother." He heard her counting the spoons to herself in a dreary monotone. "Clara's been a sort of daughter to you and father," he went on. "She hasn't disappointed you as I have done. I'd like her to have whatever would have come to me. She's always been so proud of 'Thomas Brodie and Son.' I'd like to feel she'd got something she cared for."

"What are you going to do, Addy?"

"I don't know, mother. I seem to have lost my place in the world. I've got to find it again."

A spoon tumbled down onto the floor. The big white face was stony with a grief beyond tears.

"And that's all the war's done to you," she said, "that's all. Just broken us."

Adam Brodie did not answer.

CHAPTER XV

1

THE station-master was a big man and no coward and it ruffled his pride that he should feel afraid on his own platform. At the moment the station was empty, except for himself and his assistant and a couple of porters, who stood about waiting in uneasy anticipation. It was badly lit, as became a place that catered for goods and to which human freight was rather a nuisance than otherwise, and the yellow rain-saturated gloom did not tend to lighten the station-master's mood. He kept on throwing anxious glances at the main entrance from which came a curious sound—muffled, continuous and very ominous.

"Good Lord, what's the country coming to!" he ejaculated bitterly. "Evans, you go and see what's happening out there and, if you can get through, try and stop his Lordship's car and get him to come in by the goods yard. It might save no end of trouble."

"You can bet your life the old devil won't," Evans prophesied.

He went reluctantly. The station-master proceeded with a measured, official tread along the platform to the special "sleeper" which was to hitch up with the night express beyond the Gap. By the time he reached the locomotive the noise that had so disturbed him ceased abruptly. But the silence that followed pleased him even less.

His Lordship's chauffeur did not like it either. He had been all through the war. But he was to learn that there are worse things than a bombardment. He did not like the sea of dead-white faces that washed about him. They made him so nervous that, having successfully steered his way to the edge of the pavement, he forgot to open the door, but sat staring blankly over his wheel, giving the impression that beyond doing his duty he was entirely neutral.

Lord Ivonrood opened the door himself. He wore the inevitable cloak and silk hat which seemed, nevertheless, to have become too large for him. He was followed by a professional looking man carrying a neat black case. The crowd that pressed against the car, as though driven by an inexorable force outside itself, fell back a little. Ivonrood did not hurry. He took each step deliberately and at each step those who blocked his way pushed back further, jostling each other like angry, frightened cattle. To its outskirts the crowd was silent.

Ivonrood reached the station's doors. They were held open for him by a frightened looking policeman and as they swung to again, the silence broke.

To the station-master's startled ears it was as though a pack of wolves had been let loose.

"There's still a few minutes to run," he said breathlessly. "If your Lordship approves we could shunt the carriage outside the station."

"If you do that I'll report you," Ivonrood said. He spoke carefully and slowly. "For God's sake, don't dither, man. They won't eat you—unless you annoy them—by doing damn fool things like that. It's me they're after."

He allowed his companion to lift him into the carriage but he made his way down the passage to his

compartiment alone. At the same moment the constable, fighting desperately, was flung aside and the torrent poured through—a jammed, struggling, cursing mob of men and women.

Ivonrood let down the window. It was very hot. The perspiration gathered in tiny beads about his mouth. He had taken off his hat and cloak and sitting on the edge of the bed he stared out fixedly. The light behind him made a sharp silhouette of the strange head. He was like an illuminated picture set in the black frame of the window.

The mob that had at first spread out in wild passionate confusion, hunting for the lost scent, recognised him with a howl of triumph. They bore down upon him, the arms of those in the rear tossed up menacingly.

The doctor produced a hypodermic syringe from his neat case.

"Better not sit there, Ivonrood," he advised.

The old man mumbled something. The white scowling faces surged up round his window. They came so close that he could feel their hot breath. They came and went incessantly—first one face and then another—like the comic close-ups of a cinema show. They were grotesque with hatred. But as they gaped in, their mouths stammering with curses, the faces fell into queer lines of stupefaction. It was as though they had seen something which they had not expected, which half frightened and half puzzled them. They became silent and the silence spread as it had done before. It was like a paralysis that reached to the very limits of the crowd. No one moved. They stood there sullen and waiting.

But as the train began to creep stealthily out of the

station they broke loose. They fought each other for a place on the step and hooting, cat-calling, brandishing their fists in at the open window, they were carried to the end of the dark platform where one by one they dropped off like a scattered swarm. Their menacing howls melted into the rhythmic rumble of the wheels and were lost.

To Ivonrood they had been so much wraith and mist. Now they were gone. He leant forward a little. The sunken eyes picked out each red-glowing furnace and lingered on it with an unfathomable intentness. Then, as they rolled out between the high black cliffs of the Gap, moved by some immense emotion, he stood up—stood erect like a young man.

"My dear Ivonrood, I beg of you."

They were out onto the plain now. He crumpled up instantly into an insignificant heap of clothes out of which a twitching senile face peered with a terrible wistfulness.

"Finished—all over—all over, eh Nettleship?"

The doctor inserted the needle delicately.

"Not by a long way, dear fellow—on my professional honour."

All through the night the train jolted and shook him. He sat in the middle of his brain and tried to catch his thoughts as they shot past him. As soon as he had caught one and put it firmly in its place there would be another jolt and the thought would fly off, beyond his reach. At last the jolting ceased and a spongy darkness and silence crept up about him and he had to climb higher and higher up in his brain so that it should not drown him.

2

He had been saying something. The three men were

looking at him, evidently waiting. He had an idea that he knew them and would presently remember who they were. He felt at any rate that with the two grey-haired men he was not particularly concerned. But this young man—this fellow with the intent face and curious blue eyes who sat opposite him across the table—was in some way closely connected with the enormous struggle he was making. In some way or other he wanted him—wanted his help. He was very strong, this young man. Ivonrood had had proof of it, and kept the proof docketed somewhere, though for the moment he could not remember where. It was very necessary to be strong. If he could get this young man to help him there would be no need to keep himself above this grey glutinous tide—he could simply sink down into it and rest.

"Very kind of you to have come, Major Brodie," he heard himself saying, pleasantly and clearly.

So that was the name, Brodie—Major Brodie.

He saw the young man's mouth quiver with an unexpected feeling. That too was familiar. Not unpleasantly familiar.

"I was coming anyway, Lord Ivonrood. There was something I wished to make clear to you—about my wife—about Ursula."

That was it. Of course. Ursula's husband.

Ivonrood's stiff white fingers drummed on the little neatly arranged file of papers on the table. Things were getting clearer. It was like coming out of a fog. This was his library in the house in Berkeley Square. That was Doctor Nettleship standing by the fire—and his lawyer. They were watching him respectfully. Evidently they had no idea of that age-long blankness.

"Still—it was kind of you to come. On the last occasion we met we were rather rude to each other. I

remember you told me that I had not behaved like a gentleman. I was astonished at the time. Afterwards I saw, of course, that you were quite justified."

"I lost my temper," Brodie said, smiling faintly.

"Well, that's a good thing to lose sometimes. I ought not to have made such an offer—to a man like yourself. I should have known better. But I am getting old. I have my traditions. It seemed to me that my—my grand-daughter had made a terrible mistake."

"You must think so still," Brodie said. "There's no reason for you to think differently. But I wouldn't get angry any more. You could offer me £20,000 to clear out, and though I wouldn't take it any more than I did then, I could see that you meant it for the best. But you'd be just as wrong as you were then. Ursula didn't make any mistake. It's just that everyday life's too hard for us."

He stopped short. It hurt him to talk before these strangers. Ivonrood was staring at him intently, trying to fix the thoughts that were always slipping away from him.

"You rose from the ranks, didn't you, Major? I forget your decorations."

"Only the Mons ribbon, sir, and my four years' service stripes. That's all."

Ivonrood's head swayed drowsily.

"Personally, I would rather have that than the Victoria Cross. The Mons ribbon. Four years before the enemy. To have gone of your own free will—and to survive." He smiled and the repellent ugliness of decay gave way to an appealing, almost child-like charm. "Well, I fought my four years, too, Major Brodie. Up there in Black Valley—the finest steel—the greatest output of coal—in six months the biggest munitions plant—

working night and day—keeping them at it—holding them together—four years—an old man—in my way—I have given my life.”

“I know,” Adam Brodie said, in a low voice. The sight of this hard, indomitable mind crumbling into gentleness filled him with pity and with the desire to offer comfort. This old man loved Ursula and, according to his lights, he had lived well—not unheroically. “We used to thank God for all of you at home,” he said.

The shrunken face flashed the old ironical grin at him.

“I had never thought of myself as a godsend, Major.”

Brodie persisted.

“I used to hear the fellows talk about you, sir—before—before I met Ursula. It was in the early days when we had to let the Germans fire off twenty shells to our one. They used to say, ‘That chap Ivonrood’s getting on to it.’”

“Well, well, it was for the country.” The little flash died out. He himself knew that he was talking as he was not wont to talk or even to think. It disgusted him. Patriotism—duty—these were things one did not discuss any more than one discussed one’s soul. It was indecent. This was dissolution at work at him, making him into a gibbering, snivelling, sentimentalist. He frowned, drawing himself together. “And so you have gone back to your father’s business, Major?”

“I left it two days ago.”

“Why?”

“Perhaps because I’m not fit any more—I don’t know.”

“Will you go up to Black Valley for me?”

Brodie grew very white. He glanced towards the

two men standing by the fire-place and, to his surprise, they returned his gaze gravely and respectfully.

"Lord Ivonrood, I didn't come here to ask you for a job. That's all over and done with. Ursula has gone home to her people. There's no need for you to think of me like that."

Ivonrood shook his head.

"I was not thinking of you—or Ursula." He got up, and very slowly, with great difficulty, went over to the heavy brocaded curtains and drew them aside. In the deep silence they heard the rain lashing against the window. Ivonrood peered out intently. He could see the blurred lights of the street lamps and, underneath them, hurrying shadows with their heads bent against the wind. "This is our salvation," he mumbled. "The buffeting of God—so that we remain a great people—this damnable climate—this—'sceptred isle—this precious stone set in a silver sea—this blessed plot, this earth, this England.' "

His voice failed. The two men by the fireside stirred uneasily. They looked towards Brodie, seeming to appeal to him, but Brodie had forgotten them. He did not know that Ivonrood was quoting from a schoolboy's memory. The words were very beautiful. They voiced the inarticulate emotion within him, bringing the relief of tears.

"So we think the war is over," Ivonrood went on with a sudden bitterness. "We've discharged soldiers who've done their bit. So let's get back to our old jobs and see if we can't squeeze a good time out of them. Each man for himself—each class for itself—never mind who pays."

Brodie fumbled blindly for his words.

"That's just it—I can't get back—and I don't want

to. I don't care any more. I can't rest in the old job. I want to get on with—with what we were fighting for—to carry on—there must be something somewhere—I don't know what."

Ivonrood turned. He held himself erect. He did not look at either of the three men. He spoke with a vigour and grandeur of manner as though he were addressing a vast audience. He made the gestures of an orator. The shadow of dissolution receded from him.

"I am thinking of this country, this country which is in grave danger. Be under no delusion, gentlemen. There is no peace. The war goes on. We have fought for honour. Now we are fighting for life. A victorious nation that has sacrificed too much may be defeated whilst it is celebrating its victory. We have sacrificed too much. Outside, the crows are waiting for us. Inside, there are brain-sick men who do not care for England. They are not Englishmen any more. They have sold their tradition for a mess of pottage. They have become miners, railwaymen, shipbuilders. They are a class, claiming a lying, unreal kinship with their like among other peoples. So long as their class triumphs it does not matter to them that the last drop of blood is squeezed out of this sorely wounded country, or that the civilization which our forefathers built up with their life and faith should be overturned in ruins. We have to look the facts in the face. These strikes are not for wages or improved conditions. If they were we might dare to yield. No, they are trials of strength. They are the battering rams against the gates. Behind the ignorant mob there are traitors whose plans are laid for months ahead. A strike here—a strike there—and after each the Class arises stronger—the Nation weaker. This is part of their programme. There are factories

now in England which can turn out the finest machinery in the world and they are closing down because the owners will not face the struggle which is being forced upon them. Well, I am not of that stuff." He made a vigorous, contemptuous gesture. He felt for a moment extraordinarily alive. His thoughts came with an almost painful clearness. "Gentlemen, the fight up in Black Valley has reached a head. It has developed faster than elsewhere because I have held my ground. I have been too strong for them. I have forced them to show their hand. It is revolution that is brewing up there. They are throwing over the restraints of their precious Unions. They make claims which they know I will not concede so that they may seem justified. And on their success or failure depends our industrial ruin or salvation—perhaps more than that." He paused again. The great audience had vanished. The clearness was not so clear. A creeping haze had risen between him and the intent passionate face opposite him. He came back at last, as if from a great distance. "I made the Valley. It is mine by right of creation. The men who claim it from me were nothing but my tools. Left to themselves they would have stagnated in their native bogs. They accuse me of greed. I have never cared for money. I have been satisfied with very little. What I have done has been for the good of this country—for its prosperity."

He was not defending himself. It was his creed which he proclaimed, for the last time. "Well—I shall not go back. I am dying, Major—here—in the brain. How long I shall live otherwise I do not know or care. The fight must go on without me. I have sent for you because you are a brave and resolute man. You survived, and I—I like men who survive. You did not accept a bribe. You did not slink out of England when

it seemed easiest and best. I have remembered that. You asked me once for a job, Major Brodie, and I was idiot enough to insult you. I apologise. I ask you to take my place up there."

He saw the young man stand up. He wondered vaguely whether he were going to bang the table and say, "You 'aven't even behaved like a gentleman." He began to be afraid. In a little while the clearness would be gone forever. There might be only a few minutes. The doctor had said it might come suddenly. "Major Brodie—my grand-daughter, Ursula—her property when I die—I ask you to defend it for her—abvge all, for the reasons I have given you."

He heard himself mumbling and stopped short, watching from his pale brows. But Brodie was silent. He was not astonished any more. In this strange gesture of the half-crazed old man his romantic fancy saw the hand of God. The sheer inability to grasp failure or to recognise defeat which upheld him in the long months of escape made him unconscious of the folly of the offer or his own acceptance. He thought with a kind of awe, "This is what I have to do. I have waited for this." He spoke at last quietly and resolutely.

"I am not an educated man, Lord Ivonrood. I've been a shopkeeper and a soldier. I know nothing about the conditions I shall be up against. But I'll learn them. It's a great chance for me. If you trust me, I shan't fail you."

Ivonrood made him an old-fashioned little bow.

"Thank you, Major, thank you." He remained with his chin sunken on his breast. It was as though, standing there, he had fallen suddenly asleep. But even as Nettleship took a step towards him, he drew himself up. "Then it is settled. Your appointment as my representa-

tive has been drawn up. The papers that concern the Valley are here. The officials will accept your orders. You will carry on as I would have done. There will be no weakening. On that point I ask your word of honour as a gentleman."

It came naturally to him. But to Adam Brodie a barred gate had been flung open. At one stride the old weaknesses and failures were left behind. He crossed a bridge into a new country and the way lay straight before him.

"On my word of honour as a gentleman," he said.

Nettleship and the old lawyer smiled faintly at each other.

Adam Brodie did not see them. No other oath could have seemed more binding or more splendid. The very phrase sounded like music, like a bar of a marching song.

Ivonrood motioned to the two watchers by the fire-side.

"Will you be kind enough to witness our signatures? You recognise that I am still in my right senses, eh, Nettleship?"

The doctor bowed.

"Assuredly, assuredly."

Ivonrood crept back to his chair. He watched the three men draw together. Then the little light that was left him focussed itself on the one figure, on the bowed, obstinate looking head, and last, as it grew less, on the hand moving strongly across the paper.

And now he had climbed to the highest point. He could go no further. The tide had caught him. He did not care any more. He reached forward and took the pen from Adam Brodie's hand.

His mouth mumbled in a last impatience,

"We mustn't dither, you know—mustn't dither."

3

Alec Quinn squatted tailor-wise among his books. The wooden shelves were empty, and the books themselves lay scattered on the floor in a distraught confusion. He picked them up, one by one, and laid them down tremblingly. Their rich bindings made him look the more starved and threadbare.

"I was sure you would come through," he said. "I didn't even worry about you. You're not the kind to go under."

Brodie continued to pace up and down the length of the garret. His fists were thrust deep into the pockets of his soaking overcoat, his hair was dishevelled with wind and rain. He had left Berkeley Square at eight o'clock. It was eleven now. In those three hours he had tramped the night streets, rejoicing in their emptiness and in the storm that swept them from end to end. In their beloved intimacy he had made a reckoning with himself. He had planned and prayed. He had been a little drunk, as a man is who has been shut up in a narrow cell and who is suddenly let out into wide spaces. It had been like that in him when the pale cliffs of Dover had gleamed through the fog after those months of captivity. But then he had been a child, knowing nothing but war and death. And now he was a man, measuring himself against life.

"I want you, Quinn," he said. "I want your help. That's why I'm here. You remember I told you I couldn't come back till I got myself out of that mess. Well, I'm out. But that's all. I've got my chance—but I haven't used it yet. It's all in front of me. But

I'm not really afraid. I know he didn't ask me out of pity or—or even for Ursula's sake. He used to dislike me, and there are crowds of men with training and experience whom he could have chosen. But he's dying, and he's got a sort of feeling about me. It makes me feel I can't fail."

"You won't," Quinn said. "Luck doesn't come to failures. But it may be hard for you."

"Not harder than I expect," Brodie answered. "I'm up against things I know nothing about. It was like that in the Army. But I mugged it up. I used to swot at drill and tactics and machine gun stuff when the others were monkeying round. I knew a captain's job before I was a lieutenant. It's going to be like that now."

"Yes, I think it will be," Quinn said. But his voice was lethargic and indifferent. He had taken up a folio edition of Henry V. and turned over the pages with his long, clumsy fingers. His lips moved soundlessly. Brodie stood still at last.

"You're very fond of all these things, aren't you?"

Quinn laid the big book with its companions.

"They're my life," he said.

"They must be fine to make a man feel like that."

"I'm selling them to-morrow. I've put it off till I can't put it off any more. I used to think I should die, and perhaps I shall. But I don't know, one goes on somehow, hoping something will happen, even to me."

But Brodie was thinking of Ursula.

"It's true we don't live by bread alone," he said. "It's not really success or money that people want of us. It's the other things, that I haven't got, all that's in these books, the fine things that give men hope and

courage thousands of years afterwards, the power to know what is fine and to choose it."

He looked around him. There were the pictures that he had distrusted. Now they greeted him with a strange comfort. He thought of "The Lovers' Quarrel" hanging over the mantelpiece at "The Firs." Yes, he had gone on, where he did not know. The old land-marks were left behind him. He had come into a strange country. But now he was full of the joy of adventure and discovery. He was not afraid any more.

"I've never been taught anything that matters," he said. "Just to read and write and sell sugar and kill people. I'm going back to school again, the sort of school Ursula must have gone to." He picked up the candle on the table and held it above his head. "What do you call that?" he asked.

Alec Quinn lifted his tired eyes.

"That's Botticelli's 'Spring'."

"And this?"

"It's a Madonna by some old Italian. I don't know whom."

Brodie stared at it for a long time.

"You don't need to sell your books," he broke out at last. "You'll bring them with you; you'll need them. You're going to show me what's inside them." He jerked his head at the Madonna. "You're going to teach me why that ugly thing's so beautiful," he said.

CHAPTER XVI

1

FOR several days Mrs. Seton was very ill. She did not suffer. There seemed no reason why she should die, and yet when Ursula came back to her on that drear November evening she was dying, quietly and beautifully, as she had lived. Then, as though at the last moment a secret bleeding wound had been bound up, she began to rally and to creep back. But she was changed. The wound had been a deep one. It would never really heal, and out of her had gone something vital. From then onwards she was a wraith, a gentle shadow in the Seton household, not sad or even pathetic, because she no longer seemed to have any sense of loss or sorrow. She did not even cling to her old faiths. She drifted on an invisible tide that was carrying her further and further away from life with its beliefs and doubts. Sometimes, it seemed to Ursula, she looked back at her tenderly and the pale hand would reach out for hers and hold it for a moment. But then she would turn her face again toward the mystery whither she was travelling. And Ursula knew that she had been left behind.

When the crisis of Mrs. Seton's illness was past Ursula's old friends came back to her. They were heralded, unexpectedly, by one of the least intimate whom Ursula had known best as the young widow of

Monteith's colonel. Ursula had always liked Mrs. Mackenzie. Now, suddenly, she liked her very much indeed. It was good to meet anyone who took life and death so easily and so gracefully and who was without neither empty headed nor empty hearted.

"I know it's hard to pick up the threads," Mrs. Mackenzie said, with a charming affectation of being a much older and wiser woman. "But it's like getting on a horse after you've been thrown, it takes nerve to do it, but if you funk it, it will be much harder the next day. *C'est le premier pas qui coute*. Afterwards you will feel as though nothing had ever happened, not even the War. When you come to my little dinner next week you will find old friends and delightful new ones. It will be much the same old world, a little less conventional, a little more reckless. We are all dancing on the edge of a volcano, but it's so much pleasanter to dance than to cry, isn't it? And neither prevents the final explosion. So I shall count on you."

Ursula felt a queer thrill run through her emotional inertia. It was part excitement, part pleasure, part repugnance. Then she thought how kind it was of these people to trouble about her at all.

"I don't know why you ask me," she said. "I don't deserve it. I've been a beast to everyone. I oughtn't to have any friends left."

The other's pretty, vivacious face twinkled whimsically at her.

"We all understand. That's why we turn up cheerfully again and again, though you've snubbed us enough to discourage a herd of rhinoceros. The War was a nightmare, my dear, in which we all did mad, impossible things. I don't pretend that for the older ones among us there is any come-back possible. But you are

so young. And for the young it is never too late." She got up on that as lightly as a bird that has caught up the morsel over which it has been hovering. "And so when you come next week you will find the snubbed ones rallied round you to make the fresh start easy and happy."

Ursula shook her head.

"I don't know; I'm very grateful. But I can't say now. I've made such a mess of things. And I haven't thought them out."

Mrs. Mackenzie kissed her.

"Don't think. Life's got beyond us. Just come."

Ursula went back to her mother's room. Mrs. Seton lay on her long couch before the fire and Ursula crouched down beside her. They did not speak to one another. Their love had become a thing of long silences. Ursula thought of Esmé Monteith. She knew that he would be at Joan Mackenzie's dinner. He would be everywhere she went. Behind the scene she knew he would be scheming honestly and subtly for what he conceived to be her happiness. The knowledge gave her a dull comfort. She felt tired and indifferent and incapable of acting for herself, as if she too were coming back from a long illness.

Presently the maid brought in afternoon tea and lit the shaded lamp at Mrs. Seton's back. It was the one hour in the day now when the whole family came together. Margaret, gaunt and languid, drifted in, and, having kissed her mother, drew up the blind which the maid had just drawn down, and curling herself in a big chair, stared out into the winter twilight.

"I like seeing the people outside," she said. "It's the only thing which gives me any pleasure in being in."

Mr. Seton was unusually late. When he came in at last he brought with him a breath of the dank, yellow fog. He held his veined hands to the fire and they trembled visibly. He wore now a constant look of distress and perplexity, as though he had lost his confidence in life.

With a subdued sigh in which there was at once effort and remorse, Mrs. Seton lifted her dim eyes to his face.

"Is there any news, Roy?"

"I've just come from Berkeley Square," he said, "There's no change. My poor father! There's only one change possible."

"He has had a full and wonderful life," Mrs. Seton murmured. "And he is an old man."

He gave an exclamation that was like a groan.

"That's—that's just what makes it so tragic, so horrible. To have done so much, and then for it all to end in chaos, and—and—fiasco." He looked down at Ursula. Her hair shone in the firelight with its old, turbulent brightness, but her face was unfamiliar in that moment of retrospection. It had lost its youth, its look of high victorious courage. It was very white, and the mouth had become a compressed and sullen line. "Ursula, when did you hear from your—from Adam last?" he asked.

Imperceptibly she drew her shoulders together, as though from a cold wind.

"I haven't heard from him at all."

"Then—then you have no idea of what has happened?"

She caught her breath. The stab of pain that went through her filled her with a kind of fretful resentment.

"No. Has anything happened?"

"Things in the Valley are in a terrible state," he answered indirectly, almost as though he had not heard her. "The men are on the verge of throwing over all restraint. The Unions are helpless. It's Bolshevism—rank Bolshevism. They mean to get the whole Valley into their control. It's Pro-Germanism, the foreign scum which we allow in this country through our wrong-headed notions of freedom. As long as my father could keep control they made no headway, but now, now everything's going to pieces. If only we had a Government that could govern."

"I don't see what it all has to do with Adam," Ursula interrupted impatiently. "He's not responsible, I suppose."

She was not defending him. Simply, she did not want to think of him—or of anything.

Mr. Seton drew himself up with something of his old dignity.

"As I left Berkeley Square I met Mr. John Morton," he said. "He is, I understand, the manager of the Black Valley Colliery, and my father's right-hand man. He had come up in the faint hope of being able to see him. He was in a most agitated state of mind. It seems that one of my father's last conscious acts was to install your husband, formally, as his representative, with full authority to act in his name. I have nothing to say against Adam, but the situation is impossible. He knows nothing of the conditions. He has been put over the head of men with long experience. The results can only be disastrous, for him and for us all."

Ursula locked her hands together. She was suddenly full of anger against Adam. Why couldn't he

keep out of her life, leave her alone at least for a little while? Why was he always thrusting forward in that persistent way, why couldn't he let go and drift as she was doing?

"Did Adam accept?"

"He accepted. I can only suppose that he did not realise what he was undertaking. It was rash, most extraordinarily rash. As for my poor father, I can clearly see how his mind worked. Adam is your husband, and I understand that you are the direct heir to my father's principal property. It was natural that in his failing state he should put Adam in his place. I confess now that, looking back, it seems to me that my father must have been failing for a long time. God knows, I grudge you nothing, Ursula, but to have passed over his son and eldest grand-daughter was an unusual, an inexplicable act on his part."

Margaret laughed out of the shadow.

"If anything proves grandfather's complete sanity it was that," she said. "He had a clear eye to the future. He knew that you knew and cared as much about business as a giraffe. He knew that no sane man would marry me and that my children, if any, are bound to be more or less idiotic. He chose Ursula and I applaud and admire his choice. All I ask, Ursula, is a pension wherewith I may pursue my course to the grave, untroubled by sordid considerations. The rest, take with my blessing."

Mr. Seton made a pathetic, helpless gesture.

"Margaret, I beg of you not to talk like that. It distresses me inexpressibly. Life is unbearable enough these days without our adding to it the indignity of flippancy."

Margaret shrugged her shoulders good-humouredly and turned back to the window.

"Where is Adam now?" Ursula asked.

"At Ivonrood."

It was worse than anger. It was a kind of nausea. She loved Ivonrood. All the inarticulate poetry of deep-rooted race was in that old house. It was like a casket in which was treasured the spirit of those dead men and women whose traditions she inherited, whose lives linked her to the history of England itself. Now an alien had come among them. She saw him gaze up at their portraits, take out their books, friendly and uncomprehending, bringing with him his middle-class virtues and the tastes and ideals of a suburban grocery. It seemed to her that the shadowy rooms with their subtle flavour of ancient, beautiful things, became suddenly impregnated with the smell of cooking and stale biscuits and mean lives.

She knew that her thoughts were monstrous. She could no more control them than a dreamer can control the distortions of a nightmare.

"He will be fortunate if he escapes without a catastrophe," Mr. Seton went on. "The men are in an ugly temper, Mr. Morton says. You ought to write to him, Ursula, and persuade him——"

"You must go to him," Mrs. Seton murmured.

"No," said Ursula, between her teeth.

"But, my dear girl, he is your husband. Things cannot go on as they are now. You came home for your mother's sake, but now that the necessity is over you must make a decision. You are bound in honour——"

Ursula got up. She looked round at them bitterly and recklessly. After all, she had loved him with her

whole heart and soul. And this was what it came to. There was nothing in life that had the slightest significance.

"I'm not going to do anything. I won't decide anything. I'm not going to be bothered. I'm sick of everything. I'm going to have a good time."

She went straight out of the room and rang up Esmé Monteith.

"I want you to take me to the theatre," she said, "something jolly, Esmé. And let's go on to supper afterwards." She laughed. "I don't care where. But I'd like to drink lots of champagne and get quite drunk and not care about anything in the world."

2

Adam Brodie knew that the three men were watching him, not unkindly, but with a cynical expectation. Up to now he had been a cipher. They had expounded to him and he had listened. They had shown him the workings of the machinery as experts displaying their specialty to a chance outsider, and he had watched in silence. Now, suddenly, they stood aside. The crisis had come, and inevitably they shifted the burden to his shoulders. That was what he was there for. He had to act. But from their point of view the position was not without a grim humour.

There was Mr. Morton, who sat in Lord Ivonrood's chair before the fire, his stout legs crossed, his fingers neatly interlaced, the embodiment of assured knowledge. He had been in Black Valley for twenty years. He knew every man and boy and pony at the Valley pit-heads. There was not a question concerning output, averages and technicalities which he could not answer. Coal was the beginning and end of his interests.

Elliot and Fitzpatrick ran the steel and tin-plate works respectively. They were younger than Morton, and men of a different calibre. From the first Brodie had divined a subtle difference in their attitude towards their problems, as though they had ideas of their own of which they were not yet sure enough to speak. It was a kind of unrest. But they knew their job. Fitzpatrick had invented a sulphuric acid dipper, which was to save expense and labour, but had failed to convince Ivonrood of its value. He had explained it to Brodie, good-naturedly enough.

"The old fellow is losing his grip on things," he had said.

Adam Brodie had known what was in his thoughts.

"Of course it is difficult to prognosticate," Mr. Morton said. "A great deal depends on the Unions. I know for a fact that the officials are irritated and alarmed at the general tendency to throw over their authority, and it is quite likely that they will refuse to interfere in what is a local dispute. On the other hand, they may be afraid to refuse——"

"They have refused," Brodie interposed.

Mr. Morton stiffened imperceptibly.

"Are you sure of that?"

"There was a private meeting at the Mission Hall at eight o'clock," Brodie explained. "The Federation secretary sent a message to the effect that they had enough on their hands in thinking about a general move forward, without any side-shows such as Black Valley is trying to force on them. I heard ten minutes ago." He saw Morton glance at the clock, and smiled rather apologetically. "You know, I've had a telephone set up here. One can't carry on war without a telephone."

"Lord Ivonrood detests telephones," Mr. Morton ob-

served. "They offended his taste, particularly in these surroundings."

"You can't think about taste when you're fighting," Brodie answered. "I've seen churches turned into barracks. One has to do the best one can."

"That's true enough," Fitzpatrick agreed. "We may be glad of a telephone up here before we're through."

Mr. Morton acquiesced silently. He felt half offended and half relieved. Beneath his middle-aged pomposity he had been afraid, not only for himself, but for the work which he loved and for which he was responsible. This young man standing opposite him, with one foot on the stone fender, his grave intent face turned to the firelight, gave him an absurd sense of security. It became all at once ridiculous to think of revolution and sudden death, and of those things Mr. Morton had been thinking at great length.

The steel-works manager broke the silence.

"I don't know that we're much wiser than we were," he said. "The Federation turn-down isn't going to squelch our people, if I know them. Things have been brewing too long. Whilst his Lordship was at the helm the men held back. They were afraid of him. It was a kind of superstition. They had, I think, an idea that he would always be too strong for them. I shall never forget the night he walked through the mob to the station. They would have liked to tear him to pieces. They didn't even curse him till he was out of sight. But now——"

Brodie turned to him. For the first time Elliot realised those eyes with their peculiar, arresting vividness.

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "And it's better to have it out once and for all. You're thinking Lord Ivonrood wasn't in his right mind when he sent

me down here. Well, I don't think he was either, not in his ordinary mind. He was desperate, and he had a kind of superstition, too, a kind of inspiration, a hint from God, that I was the man he wanted. That's how I took it. That's why I'm here. You've got to have some faith you know."

It might have been laughable. The three men were quite grave, even a little moved. The attack was too new. It caught them unawares. They remembered involuntarily that the speaker had lived four years on faith.

Mr. Morton cleared his throat.

"I don't think you quite understand us, Mr. Brodie," he began, with his habitual smoothness. "We don't doubt your courage or your good will. But the situation needs more than that, it needs experience. It is because of that lack in your leadership that I feel it impossible to continue at my post, and one of my reasons for coming here this evening was to put my resignation in your hands."

"I shan't accept it, Mr. Morton," Brodie said. There was now no trace of emotion in his bearing. He was dealing with men in action, and four years had taught him just what men were worth. He knew by infallible signs when their nerve had begun to break, and what they could be trusted to do, and where they most inevitably fail. This old man here was worse than useless in the front line, but at the base or on the lines of transportation he would be invaluable. The other two were good men, all right, but they would have to have their orders. "You can't throw up your commissions just before the attack, because you don't think much of the fellow who's got to take you over the top," Brodie said. "You've got to stick it, as I've stuck it

more than once. I need you, all three of you, and I know you won't fail me."

It was almost an impertinence. Mr. Morton's hands began to tremble, but not altogether with anger. He had been through a great deal of late, and not the least tragic thing that had come to him was the knowledge of his own inadequacy. That "I need you" was like a gulp of wine, like the friendly pressure of a strong hand.

"I—I should like to stand by you, Mr. Brodie," he said. "Don't think that I resign from any churlish or ungenerous motive. But I feel with—with the rest of my colleagues that the situation is too dangerous for a newcomer like yourself to handle. The trouble here is peculiar. It is, if I may so express it, the labour unrest of the whole country, boiled down to its essence. Partly as a result of our geographical isolation, the men of the various works have been brought together so as to form a practically united front. The grievance of the miner is the grievance of the steel-worker, and so on. To a great extent they have thrown over the authority of their Unions. They have been got at by Bolshevik propaganda, and revolution and bloodshed is what they want. Labour and Capital are up against each other here, stript for a conclusive effort, Mr. Brodie, and I don't know—afraid——"

Towards the end of his little speech he had grown less fluent. He broke off. His ears, that had got into the habit of alertness, caught a sound that was not less ugly because it had become familiar. He could not restrain himself. He got up. "I—I think they're coming now," he said.

"I rather thought they'd come, didn't you?" Brodie returned. "They'll be fairly worked up after that meet-

ing." He touched a bell. "I am expecting a deputation," he told the old man servant who answered him. "I'll see two of them."

"Do you—do you want me to remain?" Mr. Morton asked.

"I expect you to remain," Brodie said.

Besides telephones, Lord Ivonrood had disliked electric light in Elizabethan surroundings. Instead, there were candles in branched sconces on either side of the great fire-place, and their gold mingling with the red glow shed a genial comfort over the dark-panelled dining room. The dim portrait over the carved mantelshelf came out of its shadows to look down at the intruder with a pale and serene curiosity.

Adam Brodie knew the man. He had hunted up his name and history on his first day at Ivonrood. He knew that this was Ursula's great-grandfather. But he would have known as much by instinct, by the sudden check of his own heart. For this ancestor had given Ursula his mouth and brows, the steadying honourable eyes, the ruddy hair that even time, working secretly among the artist's colours, had not subdued.

He pulled the ancient brocaded curtains to one side and saw the lights come dancing down the black passage of trees like a swarm of fire-flies. A shrill voice started "The Red Flag," and the song was caught up and shouted in a ragged, defiant chorus. Even through the singing, Brodie could hear the thud of those hundreds of feet. It was as though some dark, unknown force were bearing down against the old house. It made the immediate silence ominous.

The three men behind him did not move. Two of

them watched him as sportsmen might watch an untried fighter in the ring, with a detachment that might become either enthusiasm or contempt. But Mr. Morton was too old for fighting. He was afraid.

"Perhaps under the circumstances we had better give the police a hint," he suggested.

"We shan't need them, not to-night, anyhow," Brodie answered.

He let the curtain drop and came back to the fire-side. Fitzpatrick offered him his cigarette case, with a sudden friendliness.

"Well, it's not my crowd, thank Heaven," he said. "But I'll make a good guess at whom you'll have to deal with. It'll be that fellow Powys and his attendant devil Israel Morrison. I expect you've run up against them already, Mr. Brodie?"

"Yes, I know Powys pretty well," Brodie said.

"I'm afraid you'll know him better before long. I don't know what's the matter with him. He went right through the war and made an extraordinary, not to say heroic, escape from the Germans. But ever since he's been back he's done nothing but breed trouble. I expect you know the story."

"Yes, some of it."

"As to that Morrison, he's a Russian Jew stuffed with ill-will and grievances and clap-trap. Of the two, he's the more dangerous."

"I don't think so," Brodie said. "He's only dangerous because he works through Powys. Englishmen, even Bolshevik Englishmen, don't think much of foreigners."

Mr. Morton found heart to chuckle.

The singing had died out. A murmur as of a sea

lashing itself into a storm invested them. Every now and then a laugh flickered up out of the darkness. It was good-humoured, but Mr. Morton knew something of a mob's good-humour. It did not reassure him.

The door opened. The white face of Ivonrood's old butler peered in. Then he stood aside with an incoherent introduction and two men entered. They must have gone straight to their meeting from the pit-heads. Their faces were primed into a grotesque mask and their work clothes stiff with rain and coal dust. And there was more than accident in their appearance. It was deliberate and ostentatious. It was a challenge thrown in the face of this room with its mellowed luxury and tempered warmth, an insolent, powerful gesture.

Powys came first. He stood directly opposite Brodie and they regarded each other in silence. Brodie had to thrust his hands into his pockets to check the instinctive greeting. The Powys whom he had met in the London hospital had not moved him as did this gaunt, toil-stained figure. Surely it was the mud and filth of that terrible, unending road on his hands and clothes. It was the weeks of starvation, the days cowering from a hunting death, the nights of frightful endeavour which had given him those sunken, tragic eyes. But the Powys whom he had known had clung to him, crying like a child.

The picture of that comradeship flashed before Brodie's memory before he spoke. He remembered that once he had looked forward to this meeting when they would talk over the old, heroic days. He had believed them unforgettable. But already they were forgotten.

Well, life worked out its own queer pattern.

"Please sit down," he said.

Behind Powys came a little man with Semitic fea-

tures and small, bright eyes that never rested, but stabbed about them in unappeasable malice. The two men sat down by the table. Powys held himself stiffly upright. His companion lounged insolently. There was a little grin of fanatic triumph about his full mouth, which made Mr. Morton cease to care what happened.

"I'm afraid you're wet through," Brodie said.

He went to the side table and poured out two glasses of wine. He knew he outraged Mr. Morton's sense of fitness, but he could not help himself. For the moment he was not thinking of his position. He did not reason that his act might be construed as a cringing effort at conciliation. He was concerned with Powys. He could not rid himself of the feeling that he was responsible for Powys and had to see him through.

"We didn't come here for drinks," Israel Morrison said. "You can keep that stuff."

Brodie observed him closely for the first time. He apprized him as he would have apprized a unit in a new draft. "He's no good, anyway." He knew instinctively that Morrison could not fight, but could hate. He fed on hatred. He was the type that rubbed a sore until it bled. Wherever there was a festering enmity or a poisoned wound he would appear like a carrion fly, gorging himself on the disaster. He was dangerous because he was sincere. He was a dynamo that would keep the machinery running with the necessary emotion until destruction had been accomplished, then he would pass on to wherever else men hated one another.

"I suppose you came to see me," Brodie said.

"We came to see Lord Ivonrood," Powys returned.

"I'm here in his place."

"Well, then, we've come for an answer."

"Whom do you represent?"

"Our comrades outside, every worker in Black Valley."

"What about your respective Unions?"

"We've done with them," Morrison flung in.

"Or they've done with you," Brodie suggested good-humouredly.

"You can put it that way. They're a crew of black-legs. They're in the capitalist pay. They have betrayed the workers."

"I'm not a public meeting," Brodie said.

Mr. Morton turned involuntarily. After all, there might be something in this young man. He might be crassly ignorant of technicalities, but he knew how to handle men. The Jew sat black and silent. Mr. Morton almost forgot the offending glass of wine in front of him.

"If there were any question of compromise I should refuse to deal with you," Brodie went on. "But, as there isn't, I have no objection to telling you so. I have here the terms you set before Lord Ivonrood and I have authority to say that they are refused. The demand that you should appoint your own medical officer and pay him a fixed salary is a mean attempt to sweat a man because you think his professional honour won't let him strike. As to the rebuilding you want and the baths at the pit-head, you should send your complaint to the workers in those trades which have made building an impossibility. Your demand for representation in the management is out of the question. Lord Ivonrood made the industries and will retain them in his own hands. That is my answer."

Israel Morrison beat the table with his fist.

"We didn't expect anything better."

"And you didn't want anything better," Brodie retorted. "The last thing you want is what you ask for. You want trouble and you want a good excuse to make it. That's why any concession on our side would be worse than folly."

"That's your last word, then," Powys said. He got up slowly, as though his long, lean body were too heavy for him. The whiteness under the black smear of dust gave his face a curiously inhuman look. "We're here to give you ours. From to-morrow morning there'll not be a man working below surface and in two days we'll have the whole valley out. You'll see what you can do about it then."

"And I warn you," Brodie answered, "that you're up against the whole country. You've broken faith with your own Unions and you're hitting at people who never harmed you. We can stand a siege. You can't. You'd better think it over."

"We've thought long enough," Powys answered, with a dark violence, "and we've waited till we're sick of waiting. We're going to act."

He turned to go. A sudden, deep regret came into Brodie's heart.

"You've been a soldier, Powys, and I know lots of the other fellows out there have been soldiers too. You wouldn't have thought of throwing up your job because you didn't get enough pay or because things weren't just as you liked them. Well, the fight isn't over. We aren't out of the ditch yet——"

"—And we're not a public meeting, either," Morrison broke in, with a shrill laugh.

Brodie made no further effort to stop them. He heard the front door open and the crowd fall silent. He heard Powys' voice and then a burst of cheering.

cat-calls and booing. A handful of mud and pebbles rattled against the window. Then the singing began again.

"We'll keep the red flag flying——"

"They wouldn't have sung that out there," Brodie thought. The regret was gone, swallowed up in bitterness. There was a gulf fixed between himself and these others. They were of another race. Powys and his like were renegades, men who had turned their back on their country and its million dead. "I'm glad I've got to fight them," he said aloud.

Fitzpatrick threw the forgotten cigarette into the fire. There was a vague distress on his uninspired face.

"Well, the fight's on, anyhow," he said, "whether you're glad or not. It's a pity, though. Should have thought we'd have had enough. And now, between ourselves, it seems idiotic——"

"They've asked for it," Mr. Morton retorted. "Force is all they understand. When they see what they're up against they'll quiet down. But they've got mischief in hand. Did you notice that man Morrison's face? They know they can't hold out a week. What they're going to do they'll do quickly. Better get in touch with the Government, Mr. Brodie."

It sounded to Adam Brodie like a fragment of one of those old dreams. "In touch with the Government," "The King commands your presence at Buckingham Palace." It made him feel curiously unreal. He had dreamed so many things and so many of them had come true. It was hard to disentangle them all. Once in an enemy trench, when he had escaped death by an instant and had seen the man who would have killed him sink down like an emptied sack, he had felt the

same wonder and incredulity. "Is it really I, Adam Brodie, who am doing this?"

But whether he was a reality or his own dream, he had to act to do the best he could.

"I shall be awfully glad of any advice or help you can give me, Mr. Morton," he said. "I count on all three of you."

The shouting had died into the far distance.

"Oh, yes, you can count on us," Elliot said grimly. "We'll stick to the sinking ship."

"It's not going to sink," Adam Brodie answered.

3

It was like the night before one of those "big pushes" when he had given his last order and every man and officer in his command knew what he had to do. Then there had come a peace—a deep serenity and freedom—and he had gone out into that other secret life where men build their palaces and plant their gardens.

But in those days it had been all very tentative, a clumsy, fumbling effort. He had not known how to build, and nothing flourished in his untilled soil. Now knowledge and understanding were coming to him, for he had paid their price. Even this ancient house, which had once seemed a lifeless thing of bricks and mortar, had begun to reveal itself, to take him into its life, slowly and cautiously, each day absorbing him a little more. It was like communion with some proud, reserved soul.

To his unconquered romanticism he had become the accepted defender of its beauty and tradition. If he triumphed, its last secret would belong to him. He would become a comrade and an equal of the men and women who had lived there—and of Ursula, his wife.

That was the ultimate reward.

He found Alec Quinn in the library. He was always there, except when he went on his solitary rambles among the hills. He sat at the table which Brodie had once banged in denunciation, and around him were books, an open "King John," a map of England, steel engravings of knights in armour, and castles perched like crowns on the summits of stiffly wooded hills and Edward Jones' picture of Ivonrood as it had once been.

He looked up short-sightedly as Brodie entered. He had not changed much with his transplantation. He was still a faded, shabby, pathetically middle-aged figure. But behind his settled melancholy there was something new and intangible, a self-distrustful hope.

"Have they all gone?" he asked.

"Yes. I've won my first round. Morton came to resign and the others would have followed his lead. But he didn't do it. I made them feel that though there were crowds of other things I didn't know, I knew how to fight. They'll stand by me. The men are coming out to-morrow."

Quinn handed him Edward Jones' picture.

"Have you ever noticed that before?"

"Yes, it's quaint, isn't it?"

"Ivonrood and the Valley less than a hundred years ago. It's an amazing change. In one lifetime!"

"There may be men alive who can remember it like that," Brodie reflected.

"Even if they are all dead their memory would be alive," Quinn answered.

"I wonder what they thought and felt when their world was torn up by the roots."

"They were never asked."

Brodie laid the picture on the table. His thoughts had gone back to the scene he had just lived through.

"It's Powys I'm up against," he said abruptly. "Old Powys."

"The man you saved?"

"Well, the man I escaped with."

"Does he remember you now?"

"No."

Alec Quinn considered him with a deepened curiosity.

"Still, that gives you a hold, doesn't it?"

"No. The war is over. I'm not going back to that." He sat down opposite Quinn and drew the "King John" towards him and turned over the leaves, as though half unconsciously he were seeking something. "I'm going to fight him and it wouldn't be fair. But it's queer, isn't it, that one can't lose a kind of feeling for anyone whom one's helped like that—it's like that blood-brotherhood in the old days that you were telling me about. Only it's all on my side. He's forgotten." He made a little gesture, putting the thought from him. "Well, never mind. It's a fight and we can't help ourselves. I've got my campaign ready. Let's get on."

Alec Quinn turned to the written pages lying on the table in front of him. They were the notes of the last lecture he had delivered before the war. It took him a moment to find his place, and in that interval it seemed to him that a struggling, tumultuous life rolled back from them both, leaving them on an island of silence. He was ready at last. He saw Adam Brodie lean towards him, his elbows on the table, his face between his hands. He looked suddenly very young, very intense and eager. It was difficult to believe that this

was a man who had known war and love, success and great suffering and humiliation.

An imaginative tenderness poured like a stream of warm life through Alec Quinn's thoughts. Cast back many hundreds of years, they took on the colour and pattern of the time. This was a young knight questing after the world's beauty, and he himself was an old pilgrim who, with his eyes upon the horizon, had missed his goal. But if he could only point the way, it would be something, perhaps, in some measure, an atonement.

He spoke with dignity and sonority.

"And so we come now to a new period of our culture and development, a period which has for landmark and inspiration that great monument of liberty, the Magna Charta."

CHAPTER XVII

1

THE room was like a cellar that a great convulsion had flung up out of the ground and that homeless people, in their despair, had made into a home. The stones of the paved floor were worn and uneven, the white-washed walls rough cast and grey with dirt. A heaped-up fire, whose eye stared fiercely through the prison bars of a ramshackle range, was helpless against the dank chill of the place that like a sponge had soaked up the rain and cold of generations.

A dismal night wind stole in through the chinks of the warped window frame and rattled the ill-fitting door, under which trickled a thin, invading stream of muddy water.

Yet amidst the drab squalor of it all there were signs of an unconscious, heroic effort. It was as though the people who had taken refuge here had, perhaps at bitter cost, brought with them beloved relics of a former life. On the shelves of a fine old dresser were quaint pieces of native china, whose gay colours threw an undaunted challenge at the general misery. There were pictures nailed to the walls—garish religious prints, a more recent oleograph of a battery galloping into action through the cheering ranks of battle-stained British Infantry, a symbolical picture of Britannia, with her sons

clustered about her in defence. Over this picture was draped a miniature Union Jack.

The two men cowered by the fire and gnawed at the hunks of cold meat which they had brought away from the table. They were both silent. Old Hughie was always silent. He was like a man who has drifted away from his kind and has forgotten their language. But he had acquired a power of his own. Deep sunk as he was in his own thoughts, Powys never lost consciousness of the other's presence. It was a constant pressure on some secret, malevolent growth within him. It was as though whatever was hidden in Old Hughie's darkened mind transmitted itself to him, feeding a blind wrath, a sense of immeasurable wrong.

His own thoughts were black enough. They moved very slowly, and whichever way they turned they came up at last against a dead wall of pain. They could not escape. There was no avenue which led out into the open country. All around him and above him, like the mountains around Black Valley, was the War. He could not remember it clearly nor could he forget it. It was a flaming, excruciating circle, in which he ran hither and thither, like a trapped animal.

Finally he came back, as he had done repeatedly since the previous night, to the dim room in Ivonrood with its soft, exasperating warmth and the man standing opposite him in the firelight. There his mind halted. The dull rage in him mounted in a rush of blood, but there was no outlet for it. He came back time after time, savagely and unwillingly, but he could get no further. There was something here that at once baffled and fascinated him.

The door opened violently, letting in a gust of wind and rain, and at the same instant a girl came out of

the inner room, so that she faced the intruder. But it was dusk now and both stood outside the circle of fire-light. They saw each other as shadows.

"That you, Morrison?"

"Yes, it's about time we went. The hall's packed, they say. We'll have to have an overflow meeting."

"All right. I'm ready."

The girl had lit the lamp and Israel Morrison screwed up his eyes against the light.

"Better bring the old boy with you. It does the men good to see him. It stirs them up."

"I'll not have you make a show of him," the girl said, suddenly and bitterly. "It's no night for him to be gadding round. You leave him alone."

"Ah, shut it, Jenny, don't you see he wants to come?"

Old Hughie nodded eagerly. He gave an uncouth, animal sound of excitement and, limping to a cupboard in the corner of the room, came back with a tattered overcoat. He held it out to her, mouthing an unintelligible appeal.

"Better stay by the fire, dad."

"He knows that there's work for him to do," Morrison said. "You haven't got the right spirit, my girl, or you'd help, yourself. You couldn't look on his poor body, and on your brother dying here in this hovel where a rat couldn't live, without wanting to strike a blow for freedom." He came nearer to her, wagging his finger. His mouth looked bright red in the grey, rain-streaked face. He seemed to have grown fat since he had come into the room, as though the misery he upbraided nourished him. "Well, you're a woman. We don't expect courage from women."

"You can expect a lot of common sense from them,

Mr. Morrison," she retorted gloomily. "I don't like your talk. Things is bad, but it doesn't seem to me the likes of you will make them better. Well, dad, if you're going you'd better have a cap anyway."

She went into the inner room. Israel Morrison's eyes followed her, then resumed their restless seeking. He spoke in a rapid undertone.

"It's all right. The water's coming in fast. Some of the props have gone already. If they don't give in before to-morrow morning the whole seam will have collapsed."

"What are they doing about it?"

"Nothing. They daren't. They've lost their heads. That young fool——"

"Here's your cap, dad." Israel Morrison fell silent. She came forward, looking from one to the other. "What's up? What are you talking about? You aren't going to do anything that's wrong, Tom?"

"We're not going to do anything," he answered significantly. "That's all."

"There's no harm in doing nothing, is there?" Morrison asked. He stretched out a sudden furious finger at the picture on the wall. "They taught us to kill and to destroy," he stuttered. "It's a good way to get what you want and the idea sticks to you. They did a silly thing when they taught their slave to use a bayonet and a machine gun. The time's come when he won't use them any more against his brother, but against the common enemy."

"You stop that foreign talk, Israel Morrison!"

For answer he snatched the flag from above the picture and trampled on it.

"There are no foreigners," he shouted. "There is only one flag—the flag of the Proletariat through-

out the world, the red flag of Revolution."

She caught him by the shoulders. With one twist of her thin, sinewy arms she sent him spinning across the room.

"You get out of here," she said.

She picked up the mud-stained piece of calico and set it back in its place. Her movements were quiet and dogged and the three watched her in a baffled silence. Israel Morrison remained where she had flung him, his shoulders against the wall, froth on the unkempt straggling moustache. He panted like an animal.

"Don't you go with that good-for-nothing, Tom, but if you've got to, get out with him, quick."

Powys did not answer. He was trembling with an hysterical excitement. He had been on the verge of an incredible thing. He had nearly struck Morrison. Some old instinct had got hold of him, nearly sweeping him off his feet.

A hand plucked imperatively at his sleeve and in a moment he regained his foothold. He came back to the knowledge of pain and that secret, nameless wrong. He did not so much as look at his sister. He thrust the door open, holding it against the wind, and Old Hughie shambled past him into the darkness.

2

*This England never did (nor ever shall)
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself—*

Adam Brodie listened to Morton's faint and agitated voice speaking from his office. The open volume of "King John," which he had been reading when the telephone call came to him, lay at his elbow, and his eyes

rested inevitably on the last words of the last act. They engraved themselves on his sub-conscious mind, even whilst he reassured the excited colliery manager. They went with him later when he ploughed his way under the black avenue of leafless trees, whose long, desolate branches he could just distinguish moving in a kind of mystic dance against the pale night sky. It had been raining and the moon was fretful and sickly, gliding behind the thin clouds like an unhappy ghost.

What a man this Shakespeare was! He said things that were true for ever and ever. He had written for Elizabethan men and women, and what he wrote went straight to Adam Brodie's heart. He taught pity and toleration and awe. It was not possible to live with him and to think meanly of life or to despair of men.

Adam Brodie had heard about William Shakespeare in school. He had been a date and a lot of tiresome names. Brodie had droned through long passages and some of them had been parsed for the benefit of his class by a faded, starved looking schoolmaster with a cockney accent. Why had he only just discovered, by accident almost, this treasure house? And there had been other treasure houses awaiting him—so many of them that he could not live long enough to find them all. Then why didn't people give you beautiful things when there was so much beauty in the world? Why were they poisoned for you from the start? Men loved the good instinctively. They wanted it. They loved nobility. They were pathetically grateful for a chance to act nobly. When the war broke out hadn't millions of men made the noblest human gesture? And from the hour they were born the vast majority of them, like Brodie himself, had been fed on unlovely things, cooped up in ignoble spaces and made to look on pallid vulgarities

till they themselves, but for the Grace of God, must have become wholly mean and grey and unlovely. Only every now and then one or other of them struggled out into the light.

There was something wrong, wrong and stupid about it all.

Brodie left the rusty gates behind him. He came to the long, steeply-winding street which led down into the heart of the town. The rare street lamps lit up the sightless eyes and closed mouths of the tumbling, rotting hovels on either hand. The pools of stagnant water in the uneven roadway brightened and darkened with the moonlight. There was a kind of melancholy and cool beauty about the place.

Adam Brodie was alone and he stopped for a moment and looked down at the valley beneath him, measuring himself against it. He knew that this was the turning point. The crisis faced him. If he failed—well, there was an end of him. If he won—if he broke the back of this dastardly business—neither Morton nor anyone else would ever question him again. Nor did he consider failure. He had made his plans. Whilst the others imagined him supinely awaiting the catastrophe, he had gone ahead, foreseen the enemy's move and countermoved. He felt the intoxication of crude power rush over him, as he thought of the silent forces that lay beyond the Gap, awaiting his orders.

He was going to crush these traitors so that they would not show their faces in the Valley again.

And to-morrow there would be headlines in the papers. Ursula would read them—Ursula—Ursula.

As Brodie hurried on, other people joined him. They

straggled out of the side streets, coming together till they formed a steady, downward flowing stream. There was no end to them. They poured from darkness into light and into darkness again, silent and undivertible. It seemed to Brodie that they were not quite real. They were like figures in a dream that had gone on ever since man had eaten his daily bread in the sweat of his brow.

In a blind alley a knot of bedraggled women clustered round an emaciated Methodist preacher, whose shrill voice rose higher and higher in a climax of dire threatening and exhortation. The women held their shawls close about them and their faces stared out bleakly in the lamplight. Gaunt or bloated, they wore the same look of a stoic, dogged faith. One at least of them was drunk. They broke in with muttered cries of "Jesus, save us—Oh, Lord, have mercy upon us!" and as Brodie passed they began to sing in their tuneless, pathetic voices:

*What can wash away my sins?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

He kept to the shadow of the houses. At the cross roads, where the trams from the various works met, he turned aside, avoiding the congested, seething High Street. There were no trams running now. The stream had become a torrent and swamped the handful of police who had struggled to keep it within its borders. The shops were black and shuttered, as if against a siege. Their garish glitter, which had lent the street a false air of gaiety, had gone, leaving the actual wretchedness stark naked.

Brodie came out at last to the right of the Mission

Hall. From the deserted corner where he stopped he could see the red lantern, with its white cross shining ironically over the heads of the people. A dark, gesticulating figure was speaking from the steps. But the crowd seemed in no mood to listen. It cheered repeatedly and irritably. In the dim light Brodie could see its body heave backwards and forwards like a wounded monster.

He remained there for several minutes. It is easier to face the bayonets and machine guns of a disciplined and recognised enemy than the irresponsible and aimless fury of a hostile mob. There is something in its voice and gesture that strikes sick fear into the heart. It is as though in that fierce melting of personality only the crudest, most bestial instincts of men survive.

But what held him was not fear, but a great loneliness. When he had gone up against the German trenches he had been supported by the men he led, by the spirit of a whole people. Even in that long, desolate struggle for freedom he had been dimly aware of an invisible host of men and women of his blood, upholding and sustaining him. But now who was behind him? Whom did he represent? What cause?

He tried to think of Ursula. Other men had told him that in a fight they forgot their nearest and dearest, but Ursula had been with him always. Perhaps that was because they had actually faced death together. She was in his blood. She represented for him those inarticulate ideals for which they had both been ready to die. But now she had become a dim, almost insignificant figure. She stood afar off from this struggle. He saw with a sudden clearness that she did not justify it. To win so that she should believe in him again was a hideous futility. These men were committing a

crime and he was going to fight them and beat them. He upheld Justice. But that was all. There was no glory, no splendour in the fight. It was a sordid, tragic necessity, a kind of pitiful fratricide.

"But when it first did help to wound itself."

A policeman came round the corner and flashed a suspicious lantern into his face. Then he apologized.

"Sorry, sir. But there's a lot of queer customers out to-night. If you take my advice you'll get out of this place quick. They're working up for a nasty temper."

Brodie laughed.

"Why, I'm one of the chief speakers, constable," he said.

At first they did not notice him. He made his way through the loose outskirts of the crowd without difficulty. Israel Morrison was still speaking. Brodie remembered to have seen the man before; just as he was now standing on a soap-box and shouting, the sweat running down his dark face, his mouth a black angry hole. But as Brodie reached the closely welded inner circle, Morrison finished amidst a howl of approval and those nearest began to eddy in a feverish uncertainty. A man immediately in front of him swung round and gaped into Brodie's face. He shouted something and instantly the disintegrating crowd closed up in an excited, furious rush. Even then there was a certain ironic humour in their anger.

"Hello, little Brodie, come to see the fun?"

"Hold him up! Let's have a look at his Almighty-ness."

"The dirty spy, take him out and wash him."

But those next him were silent. It seemed as though their nearness to one another disconcerted them. Their faces were so close to his that they looked distorted and grotesque. The heat of their bodies pressing against his was menacing. He pushed on doggedly. He knew that if one man struck him he would go under and be killed; not because they wanted to kill him, but because it was the mob with which he had to deal, conscienceless, irresponsible, afraid of itself with a fear that at one violent gesture might break into a headless, hysterical panic.

He reached the steps. He dragged himself out of the struggling, shouting mass, like an exhausted swimmer. Someone whom he recognised vaguely as a foreman from the steel works, held out his arms trying to hold him back. But there was a rush behind him of those who themselves were being driven and he was carried by sheer force through a doorway jammed already to suffocation. The crowd inside the building rose to its feet with a sound like a rush of wind. Brodie had a stupifying sensation of waves breaking over his head. The heat for a moment nauseated and confused him. Then he steadied. And as he fought his way forward he became aware that they were not all against him, that there were men in the audience who were silent and uneasy and afraid of the violent course that had been taken, and who instinctively rallied to him. His presence alone gave them courage, but more than that, there was that something in his fighting quality which had always inspired men, something high-tempered and generous, wholly without malice.

Those who could reach him closed about him. They rushed him forward shoulder high, almost flinging him

upon the platform. But he kept his feet and the crowd cheered an ironical appreciation. After all, he had pluck. Something there was in common between them, a sporting temper, love of a good fighter, even though he were the enemy.

Powys was on the platform. Brodie caught a glimpse of him and thought there was a moment's recognition in the latter's eyes. But it passed instantly into a look of black and baffled anger.

"If you've come here to meet our demands you can speak, if not, get out."

In the expectant lull Brodie answered loudly and clearly.

"I have not come here to meet any demands, but to speak to those men who have left the pumps and who will be responsible for the ruin of half the people in this place if they do not return to their posts within the next few hours. I ask for five minutes fair play."

A stone whizzed from somewhere at the back of the hall. He moved his head and the missile crashed through the window behind. "If that man had been one of my bombers I'd have sent him to the rear to peel potatoes," Brodie said.

They laughed with him. With a little joke he had won his chance. It struck him as wonderful that they should be able to laugh in the midst of their anger. He, too, had been full of bitterness, but the laughter melted him. He recognised it. He knew of old the indomitable humour that had always had a grin ready for death and suffering and even the enemy. He looked down at them and saw that, after all, they were not a race apart. There were faces among them such as he had seen turned up to the sky after a battle, faces of men whom he had loved and who had loved him

and followed him in faith. They were not vicious, but kindly, generous and pathetic. They were men, like himself, groping blindly out of their environment and their own weaknesses and error to a far-off beckoning good.

And he was there to threaten and coerce them. In the next few minutes his relation to them would be signed and sealed. There was one way, a certain way. There might be another. It depended on himself.

He found that he was praying as he had done once before:

"Make me big enough—make me big enough."

3

From first to last they were held, not so much by what he said, but by the consciousness of that secret emotion in him. And gradually it was born in upon the most bitter that he was not concerned with their defeat and his own personal victory, that the strike itself had ceased to be the issue between them. He was standing there for something at once bigger, less tangible, an idea, a faith that in some dim, resentful way they knew to be common to them all. So that one by one they fell silent.

But at first shouts and taunts ran around the outskirts of the packed hall like a prairie fire that, stamped out in one place, leaps to fresh ground.

"If you haven't come here to accept our conditions you'd better clear out and save your skin." Powys repeated with a savage monotony.

"I have not come here to make or accept conditions," Brodie answered, "but to demand that you keep your own laws." He waited till the jeering laughter died down. "We hate the Germans," he said unexpectedly

and very quietly, as though there were no struggle between them. "I am not thinking now of the civilian hatred, but of our hatred, the hatred of the men who fought them. It wasn't because they began the war, not because they overran Belgium. That wasn't enough. One couldn't hate the German soldier for fighting for his country, right or wrong. You remember, some of you, that first Christmas. There was a lot of fraternizing, exchanging souvenirs, men we were going to kill or who would kill us the next day, shaking hands. We didn't hate them, not then. We didn't know. But afterwards—now—the very thought of them makes us sick. Because they were dirty fighters, because when they fought they did filthy, indecent things, and gloated over them. Some of you, I know, were at Courtre Court. You remember what they did there to the civilians, women and children who could never have harmed them, out of sheer malice, and—beastliness. You can't forget it. You could forgive their wanting to boss the world—but not that. That's why though we've made a peace of sorts and though we know that we should forgive our enemies—we can't. We can't do it. Not the men who fought. So that for generations to come there's going to be a poison in the world, a sore that can't heal, a horrible gulf between men and men, things that need never have been if they had fought—like—like soldiers with clean hands."

"What's that to do with us?" someone shouted defiantly.

Brodie swung round upon the interrupter.

"It has to do with us. Because you and I are going to fight each other and one of us has got to be beaten. And then we've got to forgive each other and live together in peace—and—and brotherliness. And whether

we can do that or not depends on how we fought, whether we kept the rules, not hitting below the belt, not doing things that can't be forgotten or forgiven."

There was a stir as though a wind had swept through the stifling room.

"Who's doing them? Haven't we a right——"

"Who's not fighting fair——"

"You're not, the men who left the pumps. You're hitting at people who never hurt you, who have no concern in this quarrel. You're betraying your own kind, the country—England——"

"Shut that. None of that talk. Don't you listen to him men. It's the old stuff—capitalist clap-trap. Don't you listen. He's trying to set you against your brother-workers. You've been had that way before. Don't you be fooled. What's England to you? The Proletariat throughout the world—hurrah—hurrah——"

The high, venomous voice broke. Though Brodie did not look towards the speaker, he was aware of a figure lifting itself for a moment above the heaving crowd and waving frantic black arms like some grotesque and hateful scarecrow. It was no more than a shadow crossing his vision. It did not trouble him. He had lost all fear of himself. He was upheld by a new and absolute sense of rightness.

"I can tell you what England is to you," he said. "She's yourselves—you and me—and what we've inherited from our people and what we're going to hand on to our children. You can't get rid of England by shouting. You can't shake off your nationality by vote any more than you can shake off your soul. It's the root of our lives. Tear ourselves free and we're no good, no good to anybody on earth. We're people without a home, tramps and vagabonds, picking and steal-

ing and giving nothing. Patriotism isn't clap-trap. It's a truth, and truth doesn't change because some of you don't like it. You talk of class. But there's more comradeship and understanding between an English lord and an English pit boy than there is between the pit boy and his like in France or Germany or Russia or any country you like to think of. Nationality isn't just language or custom—it's character—and vision."

A group at the back of the hall laughed out savagely. "That's enough. We didn't come here for a lecture. How much do you get by the hour, little Brodie? Did your wife teach you to talk so beautifully? Keep that stuff for Ivonrood. He'll like it."

But the silence about Brodie was deepening and spreading.

"Nationality doesn't mean hatred or war," he went on patiently, "any more than individuality means hatred and war. It means progress. We've each got something that the others haven't got and need. And this country has got something—something worth while—something that we English people have been groping after—blundering after for hundreds of years. I don't know what exactly. But we were ready to die for it—all of us—you and me and Lord Ivonrood and his grand-children. I didn't think much about it at the time, not till I came back. But I'm getting at it now. It's good-will and tolerance and decency and fair play."

He stopped. His voice had sunk so low that not a man stirred lest they should miss what he was saying. And again, it was not what he said, but the unexpected gentleness and comradely simplicity in him that baffled them. It was as though he had forgotten that he spoke to men bent on his humiliation. They might have been his friends to whom he confided, haltingly, a pilgrimage

in his own life. And they remembered the four years that he had given, and because he brought no bitterness against them their own anger recoiled upon them, sweeping them to the brink of an incalculable revulsion.

"Men who in the name of class or internationalism seek to ruin their country are enemies," Brodie said, "the world's enemies——"

"Keep your abuse for Ivonrood!" Powys flung at him. "What have we done for our class that the capitalists haven't done for theirs? What does Ivonrood care for England, or for anything but his power and his blasted millions?"

Brodie's thoughts stumbled for a minute.

"Whatever he has done he has built up, he has created. He has made something that's fine enough for you to want it for yourselves. He has made the country richer and stronger. Thousands of us soldiers owed our lives to what he has done here in Black Valley, and there are thousands of civilians to-day who depend on it for their necessities. And if you destroy the Valley—as some of you are threatening to destroy it, you ruin yourselves, but, more than that, you strike at the whole country, you commit a crime that no crime against you can justify."

He saw a clenched fist rise threateningly above the sea of faces.

"If you yield, men, you chuck away the best card you ever held."

"A cheat's card!" The power and resoluteness of his answer silenced the rising murmur. It was as though for an instant he was showing them what lay behind his good-humoured moderation. "The card of a black-mailer and a cut-throat! This country's like a ship that's lived through a typhoon. She lived through it

because she was built by great men who loved their work and didn't care what they sacrificed so long as it was well done. She lived through it because she was manned by a great crew, and because every woman and child on board played the game. And now she's running before the wind, in a rough sea, a thousand miles from port, battered and leaking, fighting for her life and the lives of all on board. And *you* come—the men at the pumps—and you say to the captain, "We'll quit work if you don't give us the ship. We'll let the whole thing founder rather than take your orders. We won't wait till we get to port to settle our quarrel with you, because we know that this is our chance. We've got the knife at your throat. You can't weather through without us and you know it. So sign up or we'll go to hell together——"

A moan of anger and protest swept his voice under for a moment, but he went on steadily, though more gently. He had thrust his sudden anger out of his consciousness as an ugly thing. His voice had taken on the old, confident, almost intimate, tone:

"And it's a ship worth saving, and we're going to save it. The men of good-will are going to save it. Opposition and terrorism isn't going to stop them. The men of ill-will can make up their minds as to that. We can do it. If we stick to our posts and to one another we'll get her into port. We've got our different ideas as to how she should be run and we've got our grievances against one another, and we've a right to fight them out and settle them. You and I—we've got our fight on. But we've got to fight fair. We've no right to do things that might sink the ship or cripple or disgrace her, or make it impossible for us to work together shoulder to shoulder afterwards. We've got to think

for the country first. It's ours in trust. Too many men and women have died for it for us to forget that." He faltered, flushing with a sudden, painful self-consciousness. But he went on stubbornly. "You know the sort of man I am. I'm not educated. But since I've been back I've been trying to get hold of things. I've been reading, lately, a lot of stuff written by an Englishman four hundred years ago. Some of it has stuck in my mind because I would have written like that if I had had the power; anyone of us would. It was written for common, every day English people of those days—and it did for me. I knew what these people felt when they heard it. They felt warm about the heart, as I did. They were glad that there was someone who could express what they felt like that. It made me see that there are things so deeply rooted in us that they never change. It gave me a sort of confidence in myself and in all of us. I knew that there was something in you that I could appeal to—and that you would listen to me and—and fight fair."

They were silent now from sheer stupefaction. But if his sincerity had been less deadly they would have burst into a howl of laughter. Good God, he was quoting poetry to them! To them—at a strike meeting! Something about "this precious stone set in a silver sea." The fellow was crazy. But they saw that he was suffering—suffering the agony of a man who is stripping his heart naked—the agony of an Englishman forcing himself to speak of England. They saw that in his effort to reach them he was trampling himself underfoot. He wasn't fooling them. He was making a fool of himself for his faith's sake. He believed as much as that. It meant all that to him.

At first they were moved by a rough, uneasy pity-

A man who broke out into a taunting laugh was jostled into silence. A kind of chivalry was rising out of their boisterous temper, an indefinite emotion.

"This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land——"

He had over-rated his memory. It suffered from his distress. Some lines of the dying Gaunt's farewell he forgot altogether, others he bungled. But these that had seemed most beautiful he gave without art, but with all the driving force of his sincerity. At the end, in a flash of sheer dramatic instinct, he flung in Bolingbroke's triumphant reassurance—the words which had haunted him since he had left Ivonrood. It was a *coup de théâtre* that might have been crude and laughable. But he was not an actor ranting familiar, threadbare passages, he was a man who had dug for this treasure, with his own hands, and held it up with a simple pride.

Someone cheered, ironically, but the sound was a spark falling on gunpowder. The leaders were powerless, swept off their feet by an avalanche that came thundering down on them from the height of four centuries.

In the bewildered silence that followed Brodie spoke again. He took an involuntary step forward. He was not conscious of himself now, no more than he had been the minute before some attack. He was concerned simply with his responsibility and the task before him. His voice sounded metallic and very confident.

"The engineers will return to their posts at once. I call for volunteers to go down with me."

Mr. Morton had had a bad hour, and when the door

of his office opened abruptly he stood up with a haste which sent the telephone at his elbow crashing to the ground. He had been fingering it on and off all the evening, trying to make up his mind to take matters into his own hands, and now he had put the instrument finally out of action. He trembled visibly. The yellow murk of the room made him look livid and some of his portliness seemed to have oozed out of him, leaving him a pouchy, sagging figure.

"Well?"

Adam Brodie nodded.

"It's all right. The engineers are going back at once."

"Thank God. Thank God. But what's happened?"

"I went to their meeting. They gave me five minutes and I talked to them straight. Evidently Morrison had stampeded them. They listened to reason. The strike goes on. They're set on that. But they'll fight fair."

"Well—well——," Mr. Morton gulped. Suddenly, because he had suffered, he grew very angry. "I—I suppose I ought to congratulate you, sir. I do—I do. But I cannot help adding that I consider it most rash, if I may say so, most reckless to leave such a situation to chance—to—to mere eloquence."

"I didn't," Brodie said. He went over to a cupboard and turned out of its depths an old, coal-stained sweater, a golf-cap which he set on back to front, and a pair of water-proof leggings. "I didn't," he repeated. "The government had sent up a train load of sailors, who would have manned the pumps in an hour. They were waiting at Penwyre for orders. There wasn't the slightest danger."

"Then why, in God's name, didn't you tell the men

that? It would have been most salutary—most salutary. That would have shown them that we will not be black-mailed."

"I didn't want to. I was going to, but I changed my mind. And I won all the same, so that there's no need to say any more about it."

Mr. Morton coughed.

"No—no, of course not. I didn't realise——" He began to recover a little. When not worried and frightened he was kind-hearted, and it struck him suddenly that this incalculable young man was looking very white and thin. He watched him throw off his coat and peel himself into the sweater, for a moment, without understanding. Then, light breaking in on him, he burst out:

"My dear Brodie, you're not dreaming of going down——"

"I've got volunteers for mending the support in 'L' seam," Brodie explained. "They're waiting for me at the cages."

"But it's ridiculous. There'll be considerable danger for some time. You know nothing about the work. You'll simply be in the way."

"Well, I'm going, all the same." He had finished his preparations. He took his Davy lamp down from the hook. Then, just as he reached the door, it occurred to him that he had been both curt and inconsiderate. This old civilian couldn't understand. He had never had the chance to learn the obligations of leadership. He looked back, his blue eyes full of a great kindness. "I'm sorry I worry you so," he said. "I have to go my own way. Have a good night's sleep, Mr. Morton. And don't worry. We'll pull through."

CHAPTER XVII

1

THERE were no headlines in the papers. A column devoted to Labour Unrest commented on the fact that an unauthorized strike had broken out in the Black Valley colliery, but added that an attempt to swamp the mines had been frustrated and that the situation was well in hand. Adam Brodie's name was not mentioned, and Ursula never saw the paragraph at all.

She did not look for it. She was concerned with the rest of the world in forgetting. It was an extraordinarily easy and simple process. Peace was scarcely a year old, and yet to mention the War or any of its old battle-cries was like stirring up the dust of relics in an attic. People had said, "We shall never forget," "Not in this generation," "The world will never be the same again," and already they were fighting for the enemy's trade and quarrelling among themselves. They had gone back to their sports, their amusements and their money-making, as though after some rude interruption which, having been disposed of, were best forgotten. They talked of ruin, bankruptcy, Labour Unrest and crushing taxation as though they were talking of the affairs of another world. These things did not affect the individual or prevent him going his merry way.

Of course there were the dead. There were the people who had loved them. But they had kept silence in the worst hour of their loss. It was not likely that they would begin to speak now. In any case, grief, too, had a way of becoming dim.

Sometimes little things would shock Ursula into a moment of intolerable remembrance. They were negative things. She would open a copy of "Punch" and there would be the familiar figures of before the War—the "nut" and the "flapper" and the golfer and the huntsman and the old lady and the comic parson. Nothing had changed. Not a new type, not even a new joke seemed to have evolved out of all that suffering. An avalanche had descended on the world and those who survived gave themselves a shake, picked up their scattered possessions, and resumed the dance. Life, to Ursula's sickened fancy, was just a Juggernaut that went on, over everything, through everything, undivertible and unchangeable.

It was not more than a momentary shock. Then she would realise that it was all quite natural and right. The War had been something abnormal, like a disease. It was essentially non-creative, so it was no use expecting anything lastingly fine from it. It was so hideous that one couldn't really believe that it had ever actually happened. It balked both memory and imagination like a crazy nightmare. There was no sense in even thinking about it or one's part in it.

Ursula's part included Adam Brodie. And it was amazing how dim he had become. He was as unreal to her as the night when her ward had been blown into a shapeless ruin. She could not believe that she had endured anything so terrible with so much courage. Nor could she believe in Adam Brodie. He did not write,

and his silence strengthened the illusion that he had never been.

But there was an endless succession of dances and dinner parties. And Esmé Monteith might be ordered to India at any minute. That at least was actual—pressingly actual.

Nevertheless Ursula was destined to hear of Black Valley and its affairs. She sat beside Esmé Monteith at dinner and he was telling her of his new appointment. It gave him enormous satisfaction, he said in his quiet way. He would be able to help keep the Afghans and the Russians and the Indian Bolsheviks in their places. He expected fighting. The great mass of the Indian people were loyal and it was the duty of every Englishman to prevent the subsidised traitors from turning India into the plague and famine ravaged shambles which it had been before the time of British government. There was work to be done—fine work. He was glad to have a hand in it. He looked forward to his departure. He wanted to get out of England with its petty political bickerings.

Ursula knew that he told her all this because he loved her, and believed that sooner or later they would be together. Nothing had been said between them, but there was no other outcome to this deepening intimacy—this dependency.

And then suddenly she caught the name "Black Valley" spoken by someone across the table. An elderly Government official whom Ursula did not know was expatiating on the moral weakness and vacillation of the age.

"The instance is typical," he declared. "It was rank Bolshevism. By threatening the mine owners with the ruin of their property they meant to enforce conces-

sions. Well, we were prepared to act strongly. Everything was on our side—public opinion and even Labour itself. The strikers were hopelessly in the wrong. It was an opportunity to exert force. And we were ready to exert it. We had bluejackets waiting to step in. It might have meant a fight—and personally I should have welcomed it. We need a little blood-letting to bring the men to their senses. But what does this Brodie do? Conciliates, cajoles, pleads—I don't know what—so that the men went back to the pumps, thinking they'd had us by the throat and that they'd let us go by an act of grace. A miserably cowardly business."

He drank his wine with an air of disgust. He had made the whole table listen to him and there was an impressive silence. Then a pale, delicate looking man at the far end spoke.

"I think it was for the best," he said. "We don't want machine guns in this country. They're un-English and anti-deluvian into the bargain. They settle nothing. They make settlement more difficult."

"The man was a coward," the Government official stated dogmatically. "A typical coward."

"That's not true," Ursula said. "I know that it's not true."

He looked across at her in astonishment. He saw a rather handsome girl whose name he had forgotten, but whose deepened colour and widely direct gaze warned him that he had, as he expressed it to himself, put his foot in it. But long experience had taught him how to withdraw his foot adroitly. He made her a little bow.

"In that case I amend my statement. Let us say that I can consider the step a very grave mistake."

The conversation swung peacefully into a side chan-

nel. But there was no one at the table, except her *vis à vis* who did not know that Ursula had defended her husband. It was a justifiable defence, but also it was a ridiculous *gaucherie*. It was the clumsy outburst of a schoolgirl. It had sprung upon her unawares—one of those reckless impulses of which her marriage itself was an example. Or was it? Could anything so shallow as an impulse entail such profound consequences—this sudden recurring wretchedness that was almost physical in its intensity? And was forgetfulness anything more than a thin skin which men grafted over their deepest wounds, over their most unforgettable actions?

She meant deliberately to forget Adam. He had given her the right. She hoped that he would forget her. It was the best thing that either of them could do. They had proved themselves impossible in each other's lives. Then at a word she had flared up—stood shoulder to shoulder with him.

Monteith went on talking quietly, as though nothing had happened. Yes—it was easy for him. If one had something to do—something to look forward to that had the slightest sense in it. These tedious, stupid dinners—this imbecile gyrating.

Afterwards he drove home with her. She turned out the limousine's electric light and sat stiffly upright, staring with a blank, hard face out of the open window.

"That man had no right to say that," she said. "Whatever Adam did it wasn't cowardly. But I don't know—I don't know anything. He's never written to me. He's gone right out of my life—as though he had been a sort of dream."

"Do you want to hear from him?" Monteith asked.

"No—it would only hurt worse. It's so useless. But that's what everything is. Just useless."

She turned her tragic young face towards him and the hot desire to take her in his arms and comfort her grew cold. It was not time. He had to think of her happiness. He had to make the transition as painless for her as it could be. He took her hand and held it in a loving, sustaining comradeship. It was reward enough for him to feel that she was clinging to him.

2

Suddenly Alec Quinn changed the course of his instruction. He sat up all through one night working out the new programme, with the tireless enthusiasm of a born teacher. Culture and beauty were scrapped. He pushed the history of kings and nobles and statesmanship on one side. It was the history of the common people of England that he gave Adam Brodie—the history of the race from which Brodie himself sprang, the little shopkeeper, the soldier and the peasant throughout the ages. He painted boldly on a huge canvas. He brought his pupil, with great strokes which had something of the sweep of genius, to the final picture of Victorian industrialism. He put into his hands the text books of the time, the dry statistics, the fiery eloquence of reform, the stammering outcry of a people writhing in the claws of a monstrous machinery.

There he left him. He seemed suddenly and deliberately to stand aside.

Brodie worked at this vast stuff far into the nights. He spoke very little to Quinn of the results. It was as though unconsciously he had accepted the latter's challenge. He stood on his own feet. He fought things out for himself. But between the two men there rip-

ened an understanding and rare sympathy such as can exist only between two people who have accepted much at each others' hands.

The daytime Brodie spent in the Valley itself. The strike continued on its course, sullenly, with fitful flashes that went out instantly like a damped down fire. The struggle was to be kept between themselves and Ivonrood or whoever represented him, and it was to be a fight to the finish.

So Powys announced at the nightly meetings, with Morrison and Old Hughie at his elbows.

In the first few days Morton retorted with a revived complacent optimism. "A fight to a finish" was just a phrase. It meant nothing. A strike that had neither moral nor financial support from the Unions could only be a matter of hours. Moreover, the rest of the workers in the Valley had remained at their posts, and that in itself pointed to an immediate collapse. It was left to Brodie to discover the true meaning of that apparent inaction. The men and women from the various works were contributing to the support of the strikers. With the cost of living still at its height the measure was significant enough to touch even Mr. Morton's imagination. It meant that the Valley had locked forces and that "a fight to a finish" might mean more than Mr. Morton cared to think about. The end, as far as could be seen, was nevertheless inevitable. Sooner or later the interdependent industries would have to close down. But the interval would be long enough. In it there would gather poisonous gases born of hunger and bitterness. The extent of the final explosion was incalculable.

From Ivonrood there came no help. There could never come any help. He had gone back to an un-

troubled childhood, building great factories with toy bricks.

It gave Adam Brodie a deepened sense of his isolation to go through those gaunt, smoke-blackened buildings and to watch the men, the sweat rolling from beneath their spectacles, toil in the glare of the great furnaces, knowing that for them he was the enemy. He would watch the monster cranes, with an unholy, deliberate accuracy, pick out a squat red nugget from its flaming cavern and swing it high above him to the mills, where from under the relentless rollers it would spit out the long venomous tongue of a serpent. Sometimes the thing would hover over his head for a minute, exhuding a savage heat from between the black claws that gripped it, and Brodie would think of the man sitting aloft amidst his levers who with one movement—one accidental movement——

It was not as though accidents didn't happen.

One day at the copper works he had seen a man carry his ladle, dripping flame, from the furnace to the little shining vats that were like peep-holes into hell. And suddenly the man had slipped and the awful liquid slid over his feet. His scream haunted Brodie through his deepest sleep. The screams of men in agony were familiar, but this had a quality of its own.

Of course things like that were bound to happen.

Brodie came to know the men by name. That faculty for remembrance he had developed when he had fought with his men and not against them. They were not unfriendly. They knew now that he was not afraid. There was a certain forbearance in their attitude towards him. Sometimes Brodie fancied that they saw in him only another victim. But as the days passed their silence

deepened. It seemed to spread over the whole valley.

Adam Brodie went on his way alone. From Morton he could hope nothing. He knew that Elliot and Fitzpatrick were defiantly against his policy. The word "compromise" was in their very gestures. And compromise was outside his power. He was to fight so long as fighting was possible. He had passed his word.

But sometimes the place suffocated him. He would leave behind him the straggling streets filled with idle sullen men and apathetic children and climb the stony hills from whose bald summits he could smell the sea, borne to him over the grime and smoke like a breath of freedom.

3

It seemed to be always raining in Black Valley. The wind rolled in the clouds from the west and shattered them on the mountains, sending a grey downpour into the sodden town. There were indeed slate-coloured days when the clouds hung intact over the chimneys, and hours of sickly sunlight. But in the winter, at least, rain was the normal state. It was part of the burden of life.

Brodie set himself to the steep climb up to the old hunter's lodge. For a while it seemed to him that the Valley was trying to hold him back, sending up long feeble tentacles of little dun-faced houses to catch him. But he shook them off. They fell back, helpless and malevolent, and disappeared into the smoking rain, as though drawn by their octopus body into a deep pool.

Brodie scrambled on, among the mounds of the old graveyard. The headstones were for the most part sunken up to the names of the dead whom they commemorated and who must have been buried deep, else the rain washing down the stony wall of the hill must

have stripped them naked. A squat melancholy chapel watched over them, but its iron gates were closed, and the locks red with rust.

The spirit of it all dogged Brodie even after he had left the place itself beneath him in the mist. It was the embodiment of his thoughts—a crude and hideous sequel to the scene from which he had been trying to escape. There was sickness in the Valley. The old deadly epidemic had flared up in Pitt's Court, the foulest corner of the whole town, and three families were already fatally stricken. Brodie had heard of it from Quinn in whom people had a way of confiding. He could see Quinn now, standing by the mullioned window at Ivon-rood with his bony, unlovely hands clasped in a trembling distress.

"The three men had been right through the war," he had said. "They were half-starved. They hadn't a chance. It seems hard—that they should die like that in their own country."

"If they were half-starved it was their own fault," Brodie had blazed back.

Now he had just come from the homes of the dead men. The thing that he had said, with its soulless justice, stuck in his own heart. He had a vision of a gaunt figure stalking along the summit of the hills, throwing out his seed over the rich, prepared soil.

Queer that death should still have a sting left for him. He had seen it often enough. He had sent men out on jobs from which he knew they couldn't return and his sorrow for them had been without doubt and without remorse. But this was different. Suddenly he caught himself wishing it all back—the slimy trenches, the roar and shriek of a bombardment, the stench of bodies lying in No Man's Land, his men crouching be-

side him, waiting for the whistle. Oh, there had been something fine about it. There had been comradeship and the belief that was in the dullest and most brutal of them that out of their death would come a wonderful, an unimaginable Peace. Brodie himself had been sure that he could not die. He was going to get back because Ursula was waiting for him.

This mean-faced pitiful Peace! Nothing to believe in, nothing to come back to, nothing even to die for. An ugly, brutal business.

A friend's body, shattered out of recognition, had not been so hideous as that decently quiet form lying under a sheet in the squalid living room, the gaunt children at a nearby table gnawing at the dead man's untouched share of bread, and the mother staring at Brodie with hollow eyes in which shone the first onset of fever.

"A fight to a finish!" And how was he going to fight when he didn't believe in himself any more, when he could not face a victim without shame and despair?

He had set out with such high hope. He had believed quite simply and sincerely that God had given him this chance. And now he knew that he had been trapped and was being drawn inexorably towards the precipice. After all he wasn't big enough.

He reached the plateau on which stood the ruins of the old hunting lodge. Ursula had told him that one could get the finest view from here. She had described how she had sat on the rustic bench, and had tried to commune with him, believing him dead.

Death wasn't much of a barrier. If he had been really dead Ursula would have belonged to him forever. In death the essence of a man's being, his essential soul, survived in the consciousness of the living. They

knew him then as he really was. He came nearer to them than he had ever done. There was no body and cloud of circumstances between them.

It was a bitter joke against humanity that money and a trick of speech meant more than death.

There were two men directly concerned in Adam Brodie at that moment. One of them was Old Hughie, crouched in the shelter of a great fireplace where, as a boy, he had watched the logs burn themselves into strange pictures and had listened to talks of new-fangled doings down at Ivonrood and of the last hunt. Stocky, weather-beaten cronies of Old Hughie's father had been wont to come up on fine evenings and sample the home brew, and toast their stout gartered legs, and smoke their pipes and gossip in their slow good-natured fashion. They had brought Old Hughie sweets, and one of them had promised him a fine gun when he should take his father's place.

Instead, the roof had fallen in and the weeds grew thick and tangled between the hearth stones.

Old Hughie had no thought left, only memory. He remembered everything that had ever happened. For instance, he could repeat word for word and with grotesquely mimicking gestures what Israel Morrison had shouted in the Market Place last night.

"The time has come when passive resistance is not enough. You must strike, brothers, and strike to kill. You have been taught to kill in a 'good cause.' This is a good cause. A man who would clear the earth of this tyrant who is starving you to death so that he may keep intact the wealth he thinks is coming to him would be a hero—a martyr."

From where he crouched Old Hughie could see Bro-

die standing on the edge of the bluff, his back towards him, his hands on the rotten railing.

The other man was Powys. Coming out of a sordid public-house where he had obtained a momentary illusion of warmth and well-being he had seen Brodie pass and had followed him. Why he had done so he did not know. He had a vague idea of going up to him and insulting him and perhaps striking him. Powys had not eaten solidly for some days and a thimble-full of raw can go a long way.

Then, as Brodie had started up the hillside, Powys had halted. His mind took a new turn. It occurred to him that his father might be prowling about his favourite place and that if the two should come across each other something might happen. Mad people were very strong and very cunning.

Powys stood for a while with his hands thrust in his pockets and let the rain soak him to the skin, whilst he savoured the possibility. It was so wonderfully and dramatically right that it made him laugh. And it would be all right. They couldn't do much to a mad old man like that.

It was some minutes later that a queer distress got hold of him. Brodie had long since vanished overhead into the slowly moving cloud, and there was no sense in following. If anything happened Powys would only draw down suspicion upon himself. The possibility that something would happen had by now become the kind of conviction which seizes upon a mind unbalanced by disease and famine.

"Serve him right—serve him right," Powys said aloud. "He's asked for it."

But he began to walk slowly, sullenly up the hillside. As he drew away from the houses, and the artificial

stimulus faded out of his blood, the surrounding desolation began to affect him oddly. He would not admit that he was afraid. But it was like fear. He could not rid himself of the feeling that he was hiding from somebody—that behind the sliding wall of rain there were people who hunted for him, and that he was hurrying for his life. The sensation of moist earth sucking at his feet was in some strange way terrifyingly familiar. It linked itself to his hunger which had become morbid and unforgettable. But stronger than hunger or fear was the sense of being goaded on against his will by a shadowy dominant force that would not let him rest. He was being hounded—driven inexorably. There were tears of rage and weakness on his cheeks.

The thing had developed so gradually, and yet so rapidly, that he had no chance to reason with himself. By the time he had reached the graveyard he was hysterical with excitement. The grey shapes of the old stones rising up about his feet were men crouched down and ready to spring upon him. He began to run, scrambling and stumbling up the rough path. His distress became acute and physical. He sweated under a burden of sheer bodily anguish. His limbs were leaden. He was full of a violent exasperation and despair. He knew now who was at the bottom of it all. It was as though the figure of his tormentor had come clearly out of the mist. And he hated him, and yet bore him some sort of helpless, angry allegiance. This Brodie was his personal enemy. There was an issue between them and they would have to fight it out, but it was horrible—horrible. This Brodie was strong. He didn't seem able to let go.

Curious, meaningless fragments ran through Powys' whirling brain.

"We've got to get on—mustn't give up—twenty miles—only twenty miles—I was at Paaschendaele too—an officer and a gentleman—you know, so we've got to stick it——"

Powys ground his teeth together.

"Damn you—damn you. Can't you let me alone?"

Old Hughie came out of his hiding place, running and crouching alternately among the high weeds, like an old gorilla tracking its prey.

4

Brodie heard the shout, but it was muffled by the wind and rain and sounded a long way off. He did not see a shadow scramble up the side of the bluff and run towards something immediately behind him. But he was overwhelmingly conscious of disaster, and the force which sent him reeling against the broken railing came not as a surprise, but as something inevitable. It was all the hatred and strife and unholy misery which he had been contemplating materialised into an annihilating sinister body. He could not fight against it. It clung to him, exuding a poisonous paralysing heat. He lost hope. He felt the veil snap and the emptiness beneath him. He had a mad kaleidoscopic picture of himself flung down among the chimneys and blazing furnaces like a piece of scrapped metal.

Hard luck that he hadn't gone a year ago when they had believed in themselves and in each other. She would have had her memory of him. If there was anything beyond death he wouldn't have lost her. Hard luck.

It all passed with incredible rapidity. It ended like the dream of falling from a great height which, just before the moment of impact, switches off to a new scene.

An outside force seized him and jerked him back. Through the long straight lines of rain he saw Powys with Old Hughie lying at his feet.

They did not speak to one another. Powys bent down and lifted the panting, huddled body as a mother might lift a child whom she has caught back from some frenzied act, with a restraining protectiveness. Then his eyes met Brodie's. They were full of a frantic perplexity.

Old Hughie was quite quiet now. His lips quivered in a soundless mumble and he stroked his son's hand humbly and apologetically. He had forgotten the man he had tried to kill. He looked past him, down into the Valley.

It seemed to Brodie that he had endured an eternity of experience. His will had given way and he had gone down to death in loneliness and defeat. He had come back with a knowledge that was as yet too big for him. He knew simply that the bitterness had gone from his despair.

"He meant to kill me, didn't he?"

"I don't blame him if he did."

"I don't blame him either," Brodie answered.

"He's been off his head for years," Powys said. "It's been worse lately. It's this going without food."

"I know. It's all right. Lucky for me you happened to come along."

"When I saw you turn up the hill I guessed you'd meet him and that he might go for you."

"And you followed? That was jolly decent of you, Powys."

Powys did not answer. Behind the brief commonplace sentences both men were groping for self-control. The rain and sweat ran down Powys' dark face. But

his eyes were quieter. They met Brodie's steadily, unrecognisingly, with the resigned sadness of a prisoner on whom the door has closed finally. But the poison, somehow, had been drawn out of him. It had been drawn out of them both. In this grey isolation the conflict which had hurled them against each other dropped away. They faced each other in mute unconscious recognition of its tragic futility.

Powys had saved him. That fact, which to Powys was an unanswerable enigma, was to Brodie himself the lifting of a crushing burden. He had not known until now how the knowledge of Powys' enmity had weakened and oppressed him. Powys the man had been nothing to him, but Powys the soldier, the old comrade, had been a symbol. His bitterness and hatred had stood for failure, Brodie's own personal failure, and something vaster. His act of mercy was like a finger pointing along a new road.

Hatred was no good. It was a clumsy, stupid weapon. It couldn't even destroy decently. It was the weakest of all human passions. Men or governments or reformers that depended upon hatred for their courage and inspiration had in them the seeds of their decay and their ultimate defeat. It was good will that knew how to fight, to hold out, to destroy and to build up again.

"He was to have been head gamekeeper up here," Powys was explaining slowly and heavily. "Sort of set on it, he was. When the change came he couldn't get accustomed. Then there was his accident. He comes up here and frets about it all. We'll be getting along home now, eh dad?"

But they stood together a while longer, as though fascinated, looking down into the Valley. The rain had

slackened at last, sick of its own grief, and through a jagged hole in the mist and smoke they saw the stark chimneys, battery after battery of them, battalions of cowering little houses, knit together in massed formation under the frowning fortresses of slag. But Adam Brodie looked at Old Hughie. He wondered what those dull, staring eyes saw. Was it something that Edward Jones had seen? Was the blackened marshland a green, plashy meadow? Were there forests on the opposite hills?

He thought of that other old man, playing with his toy bricks. The Valley had destroyed them both. It was a monster. Men, women and children had been thrown to it—those ghastly phantoms which rose out of Quinn's emotionless text-books in a cloud of witnesses—and now Ivonrood himself. He had conceived it—reared it. And it had devoured him. It lay there, coiled up among the mountains, inert, sluggish, and insatiable. He had been very proud of it. But it had grown too strong.

Men's brains had outgrown their hearts. Their brains had driven them mad. They created only to destroy. Their eyes were bright with greed, but they had forgotten that secret vision without which men perish. In their blind haste they had sown greed and cruelty and hatred. They had not thought of the harvest. It wasn't altogether their fault either. Thinking of Ivonrood with his relentless creed, Brodie could feel no bitterness against them. They, too, were inheritors and victims. But now there were others coming up out of the soil—the dragon's teeth. If they too came up blind with greed and self-interest; narrow-hearted and narrow-minded, obsessed with the false distinctions which divide men from men, what hope was there? Only another turn of the wheel, turning in empty air.

Ivonrood had called them traitors. Brodie himself had thought of them as traitors, almost to that minute. But treason had come to have a wider, more terrible significance. Patriotism itself had changed. It was love of the soil, but also it was love of those to whom the soil had given birth. A traitor was he who ground the faces of his countrymen, who sought to hold them down or to tear them down. Ivonrood himself had betrayed his country. He had taught treachery. This was the whirlwind.

The men idling sullenly down there in their squalid misery were unjust, selfish, and bigoted. Well, they had learnt their lesson. They were not the first sinners. It was for those who had taught them to make the first gesture of conciliation, of renunciation and atonement. "Brothers, we have sinned. Let us sin no more."

The hour of empires and vast wealth might pass. That nation would be supreme whose people had forgiven each other.

Standing there in the mist and silence Adam Brodie saw the passing of Black Valley into a new world. It was the magic hour. The war had opened men's hearts. There were dreams abroad which had crept into the slum tenement and into the mansion, into the cottage and the little shop. But if the hour passed only in dreams then the whole world must go down into the pit again, killing, destroying without end.

There must be no hatred. On such foundations men might build hovels, but never an enduring home.

Adam Brodie saw a man go down into the Valley with his message. He saw himself. The undefeated romance of life welled up in him again. He was not beaten yet—not without hope.

"Better be getting home, dad."

Brodie turned quickly.

"You're not strong enough to get him down alone, Powys. Let me lend a hand."

"Not you, sir. It wouldn't do for us to be seen with you."

They looked at each other mournfully. Brodie's outstretched hand dropped. He watched the two scarecrow figures stumble weakly down the rough path until the creeping mist closed in upon him, enveloping him in a chill and bitter solitude.

CHAPTER XVIII

1

WAR wasn't much, after all. It wasn't even particularly terrible. Not so terrible as peace.

It's horrors were at least honest, straightforward horrors. There was no humbug about them. Men killed and tortured each other and gloried frankly in what they did. They fought, and sometimes a queer distorted sense of comradeship and sympathy sprang up between them. But peace was full of mean, underhand tricks and hatreds and masked cruelties.

People made too much fuss about war. They ought to fuss about peace. They ought to realize that nations went to war simply because peace was so hideously unbearable.

Or perhaps war was God's exasperation—his convulsive effort to get men out of their ruts, to show them what they were really doing, to get rid of the old illusions that couldn't be got rid of in any other way, and bring to the surface new strata of men and ideas. Perhaps it was a kind of mercy.

Anyhow it wasn't what Adam Brodie had thought it, five years ago, when he had set out to do his bit and show the stuff that was in him. It wasn't what he had thought it twelve months back—an acid test which had proved him a cut above a mere grocer's son. It wasn't a test at all. People gaped at the stories of

ne'er-do-wells and even cowards who won glory on the battlefield, but there was nothing to gape about. It was peace that tried a man's ability and courage and patriotism. It was peace which demanded the real fighter.

The world had been quite right not to take Major Brodie at his soldier's valuation. It wanted more from him. Even Ursula, following a blind, unerring instinct, had wanted more.

Adam Brodie worked his car patiently through the crowd. His head-lights glared into the swarm of white faces and blinded them into a look of vacant stupor. Horribly gaunt and pitiful faces. Some of them would be dead in a day or two. Some of them had come out into the streets to get away from the bodies awaiting burial. The undertakers had been hard-hit with the rest. There was a shortage of coffins—of everything that made death decent. Even the disused grave-yard on the hillside had been summoned back to a kind of ghastly resurrection.

They had meant to mob him, but he had got past caring, and they knew it. They dropped away like foam from a ship's bows and he sent his car roaring up the empty, silent hill.

Always these mean, dark houses—a kind of Guard of Honour, sinister and ironic, leading to Ivonrood.

But it was easy for a man who had dreamed of glory amidst biscuit tins to replace the old hovels with warm human dwelling places and to light the blank dismal windows with comfort. And his imagination, which had always made things possible, had carried him further. It had brought him, in one instant, to the corroding bitterness which was at the heart of all

this struggle. In that instant he had seen Old Hughie look past him, down into the Valley with his eyes full of a crazy bewilderment and grief.

Old Hughie had loved the land. The land and he had belonged to one another. He had been rooted to the soil through generations and generations of men who, in serfdom or in freedom, had lived and died here. The land had been the pride and significance of his life. Then suddenly, in a furious, ruthless upheaval, he had been torn loose.

According to their lights they had done the best they could with him. They had tried to fit him into the new machine. He was perhaps more intractable than the majority of men who had assumed a fatal semblance of conformity. He couldn't fit. The machine mauled and twisted him and he went mad. His mind was full of murder and violence. He did not know why. He did not even know what had happened to him. No one knew. People talked vaguely of wages and the high cost of living and Bolshevism.

You couldn't fit men into machinery like that. You couldn't divorce men from the pride and significance of life. If you did, they went mad. That was all there was to it. And once they were mad you couldn't make them sane again with money. Money exasperated them like heavy wine to men dying of thirst. They wanted more and more, but it would never satisfy them.

You had to give them the glory of creating, the right to build and to possess a corner of the Temple, to sow and to reap the harvest, each man according to his worth. The youngest pit-boy in Black Valley should know to what end he laboured, and be proud.

You had to let men take root in the soil on which

they lived; so that when they said, "my country," they announced a vital, energizing truth. From thence to responsibility, to self-sacrifice and labour for the common welfare might be but a little step.

It could be done. Not easily. In sweat and heartbreak. No scheme, however perfect, could escape the imperfections of the human will and heart. Every experiment would have to fail and die before fruition. A man might give his life, and end amidst the downfall of all his hope. It demanded a bottomless patience, unflinching courage, an inexhaustible devotion in the face of distrust and ill-will. It meant the voluntary laying down of privilege and fortune. It meant, in Adam Brodie's lesser vision, the re-creation of Black Valley into a noble, industrial commonwealth in which the slogan "The interests of Capital and Labour are one," should cease to be a childish falsehood.

Without revolution and without bloodshed. An evolution only possible to a people who were great at heart from the highest to the lowest, from the millionaire to the poorest labourer.

He could take one step at least. He had the power. Presently, no doubt, the opposition from both sides would join forces to fight and oust him. But they wouldn't be able to undo what he had done. He would have broken the dam, and the flood would carry them off their feet—the Ivonroods and the Setons and the Morrisons. The Setons would go in silence, without noise or invective, in perfect dignity. They would not even think of the man who had defied their code. He could pass out of their memories as a cad who had betrayed the trust of a dying old man, who had broken his word, either out of cowardice or self-interest—an outsider, best forgotten.

There could be no reconciliation then—no possible return.

His word of honour—as a gentleman.

He had been proud of that—pitifully proud.

After all he had only to stand firm. In a few days the extreme element would get the lead. Force would be met by force. A brief rioting, easily put down. There were men in London who were simply waiting the signal. They wanted it. "A little blood-letting—do the beggars good. Teach them a lesson." Others at the opposite end of the scale would be glad too, rubbing their hands over a new-born bitterness. But *their* harvest lay in the future. In the immediate present there was a triumph for the strong man who had refused to compromise. He would reap praise and a flattering hatred. His unquenchable fancy painted the picture for him. He saw himself restored to the pedestal of the victorious hero, he saw his mother and father at last consoled and satisfied, the Setons' grave and courteous recognition. After all, a man who could fight his way out of a suburban grocer's shop, through a world war to the position of an industrial leader, was a man worthy of their clanship. He saw Ursula look at him as she had done at Fontainebleau—with that immeasurable pride.

He had to choose—choose now.

The car jolted violently over the wretched cobbles. He felt as though an old man's decaying body were tied to his back, suffocating him. He felt as though his heart were being shaken to pieces in his breast.

He couldn't do it. It wasn't possible—wasn't bearable. He hadn't lived through these awful months, willing himself to live, to end like this.

2

Alec Quinn was alone in Ivonrood's library when Fitzpatrick entered. He had turned out all the lights except that of the reading-lamp at his elbow. His own text books had been pushed aside, and before him lay a low pile of foolscap covered with a close firm writing and scored with erasions and corrections. He had been reading intently, the expression on his thin, colourless face that of a faintly satirical tenderness; and the intrusion quite obviously exasperated him. He stared over his glasses into the twilight in which the manager stood, drumming with his thin fingers on the papers.

"If you are looking for Mr. Brodie——" he began with a cold impatience.

Mr. Fitzpatrick interrupted.

"Yes—I am looking for him. I've been looking for him all the afternoon. I thought he would be back by now. I ran right up."

He sounded breathless and slightly hysterical. Quinn turned over the last sheet of the manuscript, and laid his hand upon it with a movement of resignation.

"He has been out since this morning. He should be back any minute. Perhaps, if you wait——"

"Thanks. I will."

He closed the door and came over to the smouldering fire, but remained standing, fidgeting with the books on the mantelshelf as though unable to keep still. Quinn's eyes dropped, avoiding him. He did not like Fitzpatrick. He was the type of man Quinn had never got on with—honest, commonplace, made up of accepted ideals of honour and conduct—a good fellow who could always be relied on to be on the side of the

majority. Except for one brief period, Quinn had hated majorities. He turned to minorities instinctively, not out of chivalry, but out of a pedantic snobbery. Once he had regarded the characteristic as a mark of an advanced and liberal mind. He had felt himself to be superior to the bulk of his fellow creatures whom, nevertheless, he affected to regard as equals. That illusion was lost. He knew himself to be inferior, a warped, twisted mind that the fire of national catastrophe had melted into a brief agonized conformity. That was over. He had grown cold—the original, unchangeable twist had reasserted itself. He stood aloof again, in an ashamed and tragic loneliness.

In his struggle against himself his voice became eager and almost diffident.

"I'm afraid you are in some trouble, Mr. Fitzpatrick. Is there anything I could do? Has anything serious happened?"

The manager turned at once. Even in that moment he was amused at the thought of this weak-kneed pedagogue helping anyone.

"Thanks. I'm afraid matters have got beyond most of us. They have developed in the way they were bound to develop. That's serious enough. That's why I'm here. Where, in God's name, is Brodie at this hour?"

"If things are serious, you could hardly expect to find him here," Quinn remarked coldly.

Fitzpatrick made a gesture curiously unlike the man himself—eloquent and unrestrained.

"Oh, I know—I know. He's got courage all right. Everyone knows that. I'm not even saying that he hasn't eased matters by the way he's acted. The men

respect him for it. They see he's not afraid—either of them or—of this ghastly business. But, if he can't realize how the strike and the epidemic are reacting on each other, he might as well spare himself. Idleness, bitterness, underfeeding and the 'flu'—there you have the whole circle, and an appallingly vicious one at that."

"Is there no improvement then?"

"Could you expect any?" Fitzpatrick counterquestioned. "We haven't even reached the crisis. Brodie has got fresh help from Penwyre—a couple of doctors and a handful of amateur nurses. It's a drop in an ocean. In Pitts Court two whole families have been wiped out—like that. I've seen it myself—ten people waiting to be buried and no one to bury them. Horrible—horrible." He had been striding nervously about the room. He stopped now by the window, attracted by some sound outside, and pulled aside the curtain. Two spots of light were moving rapidly down the avenue and he watched them with knitted, anxious brows. "Why, in God's name, doesn't he see that this can't go on? Why doesn't he make a fair offer? It's pre-historic—this die-hard business. Out-of-date. We've got to compromise—meet each other half way. The majority of the men are reasonable. They see things are going too far. They're prepared to negotiate. Brodie's stand is simply driving them into the arms of Morrison and his gang."

Quinn looked down at the papers on which his hand still rested.

"You don't know what is in Brodie's mind," he said. "You forget, too, that he is not a free agent."

"You mean Ivonrood? Have we all got to go to red ruin because of a doddering old man?"

"You don't know the circumstances——"

"The men know them. Morrison has seen to that. They say Brodie's wife comes into the property and that he's holding out for his own benefit."

Quinn's body stiffened with a queer grotesque anger.

"That's a lie. I must ask you to take that back, Mr. Fitzpatrick."

The manager laughed miserably.

"Good heavens, Mr. Quinn, are you asking me to apologize? Of course it's a lie. It isn't the less dangerous on that account."

He broke off. The door had opened and Brodie himself came in. He nodded to the two men without speaking and, laying down his cap and overcoat, came over to the table. There the light fell on his face. Fitzpatrick swallowed whatever he had intended saying and for several minutes all three were silent, as though some disaster had been announced among them.

Finally Brodie spoke. He looked up from the papers which he had been idly turning over. His eyes were red-rimmed. With a shock, Fitzpatrick realized that this strange, obstinate man had been crying.

"I'm sorry to seem so stupid," he said. "I've had rather a bad time. I've been helping Samuels to make a coffin for his son. Perhaps you remember him. He worked on one of the furnaces. He died two days ago. I used to help make coffins—out there, you know, when I was a Tommy. Always pretty good with my hands. From the shop, I daresay." His mouth quivered as though he were going to cry again, then he steadied into a white inflexibility. "However, that

doesn't matter. Is there anything special, Fitzpatrick?"

The manager threw Quinn a glance, at once exasperated and apologetic.

"Only that we shall have to close down to-morrow."

"Is that absolutely necessary?"

"There aren't enough men to keep the furnaces going. Those that are fit will go to swell Morrison's meetings, I've no doubt. Unless something is done, we shall have rioting in a day or two. That's what Morrison's working for. Fighting and bad blood——"

Brodie nodded.

"That isn't going to happen, though," he said.

"You mean you are going to meet the men?"

"I don't know yet. You'll have to leave it to me for a few hours."

"Hours are getting very precious, Brodie. The Bolsheviks are trying to force the pace. I'm not really so afraid of Morrison. You were quite right about him. They don't really trust him. It's Powys. He's a Valley man, for one thing. Then there's his record. You can't throw pacifism or disloyalty in his teeth. That confounded adventure of his has got hold of people's imagination. The infuriating part of it is that I believe the whole thing is a fake. I've been to the trouble of hunting up his story. As far as I can find out he didn't get through off his own bat at all—was fairly lugged through by another fellow—an officer—I couldn't get his name though, and it's no use coming up with an unconfirmed story like that. It would do more harm than good."

Brodie glanced up, meeting Quinn's scrutiny.

"I don't see that it matters anyhow. We are not fighting over what we did or didn't do in the Great

War. We want as little mudslinging as possible——”

“Which means leaving it all to the other side,” Fitzpatrick remarked ironically. “Well, anyhow, I hope something will be done and done quickly. The reasonable element is holding out waiting for an offer, but they won’t be able to hold out much longer. Ivon-rood drove the Valley too hard, sir. He ran too close to the wind all the time.”

“I know. I’ve got to think what can be done. Where’s Morton?”

“He went down this morning—delirious. You’ve heard about Dr. Stevens?”

“Yes. His salary won’t worry them any more.”

Fitzpatrick pulled a bitter grimace.

“That was one of Morrison’s pet grievances. ‘An over-paid hanger-on of Capitalism, fattening on the earnings of the wage-earner.’ Well, that gun is spiked now, at any rate. Poor old Stevens! Better take care of yourself, Brodie. You don’t look fit for much. We can’t have you going down——”

“Oh, I’m all right. Don’t worry. We’ll pull through.”

“I’m glad you think so. Anything I can do?”

“Nothing for the present. I’ll ring you up in the morning.”

“Then I’ll get home. I hope you’ll find a way out. Compromise—compromise. It’s the modern watchword. Good-night.”

“Good-night.”

They heard the hall door close and the ironically cheerful splutter of Fitzpatrick’s little run-about down the avenue. Brodie threw aside the papers which he had unconsciously used as a defence against the man-

ager's clumsy friendliness. He felt an almost physical relief.

"I don't want that affair of Powys and myself dragged in," he said. "It isn't fair. I dare say Powys believes his story. His memory has gone, but it's left little odds and ends for his imagination to build with. You can't blame men like that. I don't want him hurt—not in that way—I don't want things spoilt——" He stopped. It was suddenly brought home to him that Quinn could never understand what he was trying to say. Even less than Fitzpatrick. It would be cruel to make him understand the significance of that old comradeship. And as though he knew dimly that there were reserves that he could not penetrate, Quinn spoke with a serious, painful humility.

"That's as you think best. I only wish to help you. I have been very anxious. You take grave risks, going among the men in the way you have done. Fitzpatrick says so——"

"One has to do what one can," Brodie answered. "There's nothing to be afraid of. It's their friendliness that one can't get over. It's as though they couldn't help themselves. You know the sort of things they've been saying about me—but when we come face to face it all seems to fizzle out. We're just ordinary human beings—the lot of us—quite decent human beings. I believe if Ivonrood himself were drowning, Samuels would jump in and try to save him. If we do beastly things to one another, it's because there's something wrong in our conditions—something abnormal—like an illness."

The same faint, satirical tenderness pointed the older man's lips. This blind optimist flying in the face of biology and human experience! But the momentary

arrogance of the pedagogue passed. He no longer trusted his own judgment. There were truths beyond the scope of his intelligence.

"I got a call through to London just before I came up," Brodie went on abruptly. "If there was a grain of reason left in Ivonrood's head, I meant to appeal to it. But it's no good. If I resigned, it would only make matters worse. I can't shift the responsibility." He saw the manuscript which Quinn had been reading, and faltered. His pallor became suffused with a deep and painful embarrassment. "Oh, you've been looking at that stuff. I expect it seems crude to you, doesn't it—horribly crude?"

"No—no—not that. It is fine—very splendid. I think, also, that if you had the power to carry out such an experiment, you would end a broken and disappointed man. You would be ground between two antagonisms—two irreconcilable antagonisms—"

"Not irreconcilable," Brodie said. "That's what I should bring in—the good-will—"

"You must have power too—"

"I have that—for a while, at any rate. Long enough, perhaps. You are thinking of Ivonrood. I came here to carry out his policy. I gave my word of honour as—as—" He stopped again. Alec Quinn took off his glasses. He did not care any longer to look at the face opposite him. His hands shook.

"Sometimes, in all innocence, we make a fetish of ourselves," he said. "Men think so much of saving their souls and their honour that they lose them—" he had added almost inaudibly, "as I have done."

"I know," said Brodie. "My honour as a gentleman, or anything else, doesn't matter. There are bigger things. I've thought it out and that's what I've come

to. I don't count. But it's been hard to make myself believe it."

"People will criticise you."

"I don't seem to care any more."

"Have you thought of your wife?"

"I am always thinking of her," he answered simply.

"You must have faith in her too."

Brodie smiled a little.

"That's what I've got left," he said.

Alec Quinn gathered his books together. He was overwhelmed by a sense of finality. Something had finished. His mind went back to the unsophisticated, romantic soldier who had dreamed impossibilities in his garret less than a year ago—to the man who had beaten at his door in a frenzy of drunken disillusionment. That was all over. Looking at the figure opposite him he knew that something which he had set out to do, almost unconsciously, had been accomplished. He had reached the limit of his powers. He had nothing left to teach—no help to offer. Here was the whole man who would go on his way alone.

There were many things that Quinn had in his mind to say then. He loved Adam Brodie. It was a queer love, like Quinn himself, misshapen and tragic, but it was the last vital emotion of his life. His books and pictures, all the intellectual and aesthetic paraphernalia that he had treasured, were now meaningless. It was as though the younger character had become a vicarious atonement. Its romanticism, its wide, uncritical humanity and faith, wiped out his own arid superiority, the fruitlessness of his learning and his supreme failure.

He would have liked to have told Adam Brodie all this, but he had not the power. He had stood

aloof from his fellow-creatures too long to speak their language.

Brodie was conscious of some painful feeling at work in the bowed ungainly figure shuffling towards the door. But he had no key to it. One of those inarticulate spells, which come to men in moments of an emotional crisis and which they remember afterwards in bitter regret, bound him.

They bade each other a prosaic good-night.

3

He was free at last.

It was strange that now, almost with his decision, this room, this house should have become his home. He was among friends—grave, courteous, stout-hearted friends. They were the books and the pictures and the darkly gleaming furniture. They were the men and women who had lived here. Brodie, who had sought them lovingly and humbly in their history, felt their spiritual touch of comradeship. He had tried to master by labour the secret beauty of their creed and the value of their ideals. Now, suddenly, all this had been added to him. He had become one of them.

It might only be for a little while. In a little while he might be out in the wilderness again. But whatever happened, he would never lose what they had given him. They had taught him the continuity of men's relations to one another. No change that did not carry in itself the finest elements of their spirit could persist. They had their part in the future—their gift to offer all men—even a grocer's son. To the nobleman who had loved his land and handed down from generation to generation a narrow yet stern creed of

personal responsibility and public service, to the ruthless genius who had torn the way clear to new human enterprise, to the idle rich who in their idleness had created the beauty and elegance of life and in the hour of danger had upheld the highest traditions of their country, their victims owed a debt of gratitude that wiped out the wrong that had been done them. All men were heirs. They were coming now into their inheritance. A thousand streams, tumbling haphazard down the mountain side, knowing nothing of one another, were to meet at last in a united strength.

In this room was Ursula, his wife.

He could see her by the high book-shelves, with some old brown-stained volume in her hand, or by the great open fire-place with the red glow on her vivid, passionate face, or smiling gravely at Edward Jones' picture. It was natural that he should see her. He knew how she loved this room. She had talked so much of it in the days when her feeling had seemed queer and incomprehensible. In her thoughts she would be here often. It would hurt her to think of him here. She did not know how far he had travelled to find her at last on common ground.

He sat down at Ivonrood's writing-table and, unlocking a drawer, drew out a thick school-boy's note book. It was already half filled, and he read over what he had written. Then he began to copy into it the corrected manuscript of the fools-cap. He worked at first slowly and carefully, but in the end he pushed the original aside and wrote in a white heat. He was fighting against odds, but to win.

The morning twilight drew a long grey streak between the curtains as he finished. He turned back to

the first page with its simple inscription. There was serenity and confidence on his exhausted face.

That was what he had left—faith—his indomitable faith.

CHAPTER XIX

1

MONTEITH had been M. F. to the neighbouring Hunt before the war and with the Armistice had taken up that position again, but only until such time as the pack had been re-established in something of its old glory. He and a hard-riding colonel, who had been relegated to office work for the "duration," were the sole surviving male members of the original gathering.

Ursula went down to Monteith's house-party for the opening Meet. It was to be the first and last as far as Esmé was concerned—something in the nature of a farewell. He was sailing in three weeks.

He met Ursula at the station and drove her himself through the narrow, winding lanes. It was dusk already, with just the red glimmer of a winter's sunset over the high hedges. The air tasted keen and bitter-sweet of the mouldering leaves that lay under the gaunt trees like a smouldering fire. It was very English. It brought tears to Ursula's eyes because of the upright man beside her, driving the hot-blooded young thorough-bred with such cool masterfulness—English himself to the last drop of his blood, loving all this with the silent passionateness of a deep-rooted race, and leaving it all because some distant out-post of Empire needed men. He would never speak of Eng-

land, except casually, critically. That was his way. But he would think of those quiet, ancient lanes when he was dying—would come back to them in the end, Even now he was, perhaps, grieving because of them.

She remembered the four years that he had given. That hadn't satisfied him. It wasn't enough to fight when the whole world was fighting. You had to carry on. Your whole life was dedicated.

The thought of him satisfied and comforted her. He gave a kind of purpose to the whirligig of living—a kind of reason. He knew where he was going and why he suffered. It lay in her power to take her share—to make his purpose her own. She had only to stretch out her hand. She could make the exile glorious for him. It would put an end to this frightful unrest and futility.

She knew that in coming down she had virtually decided. Perhaps he knew, too. He said nothing. He talked about the new neighbours who had taken the place next his, the old family having been wiped out, and of the chances of the weather.

"I'd like it to be a good run," he said, "something to remember, you know."

He wasn't going to rush her, not even now, when his days were numbered. He would play the game to the very end.

That night he danced with her once. As a well-beloved host, taking farewell, he kept to his part gallantly and unselfishly. He had the power to give happiness which Ursula knew now sprang not from a light and shallow temper, but from virtue—from an unshakable integrity. Great misfortune might come to him, but he would never lose that inner peace

which brought all men about him into harmony. He could never be deeply unfortunate.

He had chosen a waltz with her, an old-fashioned waltz, unmarred by any of the variations infused into it by an exhausted, feverish generation. They danced to a half-forgotten measure that conjured up her early youth and the beginnings of that friendship which was now rushing to a climax. She knew that he had chosen it purposely, a touch of sentiment, unexpected and potent. He was profoundly moved. She felt it through his silence, and through his great gentleness to her. Her own nerves ached with an unendurable excitement.

It was easy to love him. She did love him. And anyhow, she couldn't go on, living like this.

The gods seemed to mean kindly with Esmé Monteith. They gave him such a day as hunters love, cloudless, with a crisp brightness in the air and the ground firm and light under the horses' hoofs.

The Meet was fixed outside the King's Inn, which had been the rendezvous for the past hundred years. Not much, Ursula thought, had really happened in all that time. Not here. The thatched roof shining a golden brown in the winter sunlight, the sign-board with its quaint, faded portrait, creaking in the light wind, the dark background of solemn trees—all had an air of ancient permanence. They had always been there. They would witness just such another scene a hundred years from now. Even the inn-keeper, standing on the threshold, smiling, yet a little solemn, as though he knew himself to be only a re-incarnation, would be there, too.

Perhaps the cut of a coat altered. The women rode

astride, immaculate and austere. Otherwise what had changed? Had there been a war? Did anything ever really happen beneath the surface?

Then it came to Ursula suddenly that the faces around her were unfamiliar. She knew none of them. The young men who had ridden from here six years ago were gone. Their bodies lay somewhere in the Flanders' fields, or under the desert sands, or amidst the rot and débris of the sea. But perhaps they themselves had not changed. It was whimsical to believe in ghosts in the full daylight, and yet Ursula believed in them. They wouldn't be able to keep away on such a morning. They would have to give Monteith a record Meet as a send-off. Good old Monteith—fine old bird. She could hear their voices, their cheerful, irreverent flippancy which had carried them, laughing, to their death.

She wondered if Monteith saw them. He moved quietly among the hounds, admonishing them, sitting his beautiful hunter with an unconscious, effortless grace. No doubt, he had his memories, too. They crowded thick on this old meeting-ground. He looked grave, preoccupied. Once their eyes met briefly in understanding.

Oh, she loved him. She was glad she loved him. She would be proud of him—perhaps, in time, might regain pride in herself. There would be no remorse. One couldn't burden oneself forever with a mistake. It was a crime against life.

She thought of Adam then—involuntarily, despite the whole force of her startled will. He ought not to have been able to trouble her amidst surroundings which were so exclusive to her class and to a past in which he had no share. Of late he had hardly troubled

her at all. He had become increasingly unreal, an inexplicable interlude in the order of her life, like the war itself. The poignant vividness of this memory was a violent awakening. It seemed as though some force within her, yet beyond her control, was conjuring him up out of the very ground, so that she half expected to see him suddenly stand before her. She felt she had to turn away, speak to someone, do something headlong and reckless to escape.

She pushed her horse forward to Esmé's side. Her own voice sounded strained and unnatural in her ears.

"What's the matter, Esmé? What are we all waiting for? Why can't we start—why can't we start?"

The hounds drew the Eversham coverts and found at once, and were away with a whine of joy. The scent carried them down a grassy slope, over a straggling hedge and a deep ditch on the off side and then on—the field spreading out in a stream of colour, the horn a laughing, challenging voice.

It was good to be alive after all, even if one didn't know why one lived or to what end, good to be proud just because one was young and sound of wind and limb and could sit one's horse so well over that five-barred gate.

There was Esmé just ahead, giving her the lead over, riding coolly and confidently, conscious of her even then, with the thud of her horse's hoofs in his ears. There were the ghosts, too—the dear young ghosts with their faces merry in the wind. And then Adam—he couldn't keep out—always plunging in—sticking it somehow—on some uncouth Regimental charger—yet riding straight as a die—with his jaw set and his shining eyes.

They had luck that day—three foxes that were game, and gave them long brilliant gallops and some tricky going over the roughest country. Once Ursula's horse slipped and fell on a muddy bank, but she rolled clear and in a minute Monteith was beside her. They laughed at each other, and he held her horse whilst she swung back into the saddle; and, without a word, they were off again.

Like calling to like.

Then it was all over. The pack was called off. The early dusk settled grey and cold over the fields. They turned their weary horses into the still, dark lanes. The laughing, exultant voices of the riders sounded eerie in the stillness, like the voices of jovial, merry-making satyrs.

Ursula dropped away from them, and a figure, magnified by the failing light and her uneasy fancy, drew up silently and inevitably beside her. He did not speak, seeming content simply to be near her; but silence was the thing she dreaded most, and she turned to him, forcing her voice to a steady undertone.

"Don't you feel, in this queer half light, that we're not quite real, Esmé? Don't you think we're shadows—or just people in somebody's dream? Wouldn't that be rather a nice explanation for all the crazy, impossible things we do? All to-day, for instance—just a frolic in somebody's fancy—with no particular meaning—and now the toys are going to be put away——"

"Hasn't it been a good day?" he asked, with prosaic quietness. "Haven't you been happy?"

"Dreadfully happy," she answered. "If only everything had gone wrong—if it had snowed—or they hadn't found once. Then I shouldn't have minded feeling—feeling depressed and sick of things. But it was

fine—the most glorious run of my life. Years ago the thrill of it would have kept me going till the next time—or the next dance. But it's gone already. Perhaps the person whose particular toy I am is getting tired of me. My paint is coming off. I'm getting old."

She knew that he smiled with a comradely understanding of her fancy.

"You've grown old enough to know that pleasure is just a sort of frill—no good to anyone unless it's fastened on to decent stuff. It's something to have found that out. Some people never do. When *they* get old they take to drugs and paint their faces. You don't do that, do you?"

"Not yet. It's sad, all the same. Never to be satisfied. It's the War. It's knocked the bottom out of all the jolly little boats we used to sail about in so contentedly." Her voice shook. "The War has spoilt everything."

"You don't mean that, Ursula. You're very young still to be able to say that. It's not true."

"Not for you, perhaps. You've made something out of it. It's been a sort of link in your chain. But it's just torn me up by the roots—flung me loose. I don't belong anywhere. There's no sense in anything I do. It's just killing time till time kills me——"

He was silent for a moment, calling up his reserves of self control.

"You were splendid," he said at last. "You were as brave as the bravest of us. Don't imagine that that sort of thing is lost. It isn't. It's only a beginning——"

"Leading nowhere," she interrupted with a rising bitterness. "Oh, Esmé, it's so easy for you to talk. You're going away. You're carrying on. And I'm

left sitting here among ruins I can't ever build up again."

He leant towards her. He laid his hand over hers at first lightly, then with an increasing strength, till she felt as though a vise held her. It was like a flood of power, long held in check, and now set free, but moving slowly, almost painfully.

"You can come out to me," he said. "Cut loose from it all. You're brave enough for that, too. Begin again. We'll begin together." And then so brokenly and fearfully that she hardly heard him. "You do love me, don't you, Ursula?"

"Oh, Esmé, I've always loved you."

"Yes. But not like that. More than that——"

"I don't know. What do I know about love? What right have I to say I know? It's been nothing but mistakes and muddle. I don't know myself—I don't trust myself."

"Trust me," he said. "You can trust me. I've loved you literally since I was old enough to love. There hasn't been another woman in my life. There never will be."

She knew it was true. The tears blinded her. She rubbed them away with a fierce scorn of herself.

"I do trust you. And I can't bear to let you go. But, even if I were sure, I wouldn't spoil your career. A divorced woman—it would break you, Esmé, and I'm not going to add that to everything else——"

"It's not going to break me, as you call it. Adam will let you go. He told me he would. He's a decent fellow. It can be done without fuss or scandal or hurt to anyone."

She meditated a moment, and then laughed.

"Oh, I know. I'll write to him from my lawyers,

'Dear Husband, for the sake of the old, happy days, I beg of you to return to me.' And then he'll write back from his lawyers that after due consideration he realizes that we've both made a mistake and that he won't come back at any cost. And then, after more hocus-pocus, I shall be free. Oh, the beastly, beastly farce of it!"

"Ursula—don't think of it like that——"

She frowned, intent suddenly on the figure of a man who, in the light of bursting shells, was crossing and re-crossing the open square. She saw him stumble down the uneven stairs of their dugout and lurch towards her, breaking at the knees. She saw his face as she drew his head against her breast. It was as though a cunning and ruthless power were throwing pictures, one after another, onto the black screen of the trees.

If you believed that there was anything holy or pure or permanent in life, then the lawyers letters were blasphemous. But if you didn't, then you saw that the whole thing was a huge joke. You laughed at human beings for taking themselves so seriously.

"Will you come, Ursula? I'll have to wait for you; but, if you promise, I'll be content."

She answered at once.

"Yes—I'll come."

It was finished. There would be no more unrest. She had burnt her boats. She couldn't have gone on like that any longer.

He lifted her hand and kissed it, then he drew back austere. But she heard his silence like a song of thanksgiving. She felt his happiness blaze up in him like a great fire.

She herself stared ahead with hard set face, think-

ing, "Now, you'll have to go, Adam. You'll have to leave me in peace. It's all over. I've chosen——"

2

Ursula did not come down to dinner that night. She sent a message to Monteith, who answered with a note which she was destined never to read. She put it down beside her, unopened, and afterwards it was returned to him by a servant who had found it in clearing the room—a mute and significant testimony.

There was a telegram on Ursula's table, and a square, registered parcel.

Her grandfather was dead. As she had read the formal announcement, she had drawn a sigh of physical relief. It was as though something tortured had been set free. In her subconscious life he had been a constant, tragic presence—a terrible little old man condemned to play with a child's bricks—but now that image of him was wiped out. He was once more as she had loved and respected him, free from the bodily humiliation which he had accepted deliberately as the price of his purpose. His released spirit had gone back to Ivonrood.

But she could never go back. He had chosen her to succeed him, but she had blundered and muddled and ruined everything, and the Valley would slip through her father's or Margaret's weak and indifferent control into the power of strangers, to whom it would be nothing but a source of wealth. That was part of the choice. She would never stand again on the heights overlooking the Valley and feel herself a part of all that vast energy of creation. She was going to India presently as Esmé Monteith's wife. She would live at jolly Indian stations, gaily, rather dangerously

perhaps, and grow hard and glittering, as so many Anglo-Indian women did, who, like herself, had been torn from their roots.

She did not open the registered parcel till several hours later, when her mind was settled and quiet in the course which she had set herself. Even then she turned to it indifferently, almost mechanically, as one turns to some casual intrusion. It meant, at first, nothing to her.

There was no letter inside—merely a copy-book, with a hint of boyishness, in contrast to the mature writing which covered its pages. But it halted her like a bullet through the heart. She was for a moment panic-stricken—then shaken by a headlong resentment and bitterness and a wild gaiety.

She had burnt her boats. She had stood at the crossroads and made her choice. She had really thought her destiny signed and sealed. How mad when there was still Adam Brodie to deal with—Adam Brodie who didn't know how to let go. How mad to read into his silence anything but a slow gathering of his strength. He couldn't leave her to her hard-won peace. He wasn't capable of it—he hadn't the chivalry. It wasn't in his code.

She caught her name on the pages—not often, but significantly, like a subdued *leit-motif*.

She began to read. That much she had to do. Not to-morrow, but now. She was not a coward at any rate. She could never rest until the issue between them was fought out. Whatever appeal or claim he made she had to face and answer.

But he made no appeal—no claim. That she had to acknowledge at once—in the height of her anger. What he had sent her was, at first sight, simply the

record of his stewardship. It was written in the form of a diary. Every night, apparently, after the day's work, he had sat down and described what he had seen and done, omitting nothing—his first inspection of the collieries, his first encounter with the officials under him, his first impressions. Businesslike, prosaic stuff. Why she read on she hardly knew. Perhaps the mere critical faculty in her was already stirred. Something she did recognize in these bald, simple sentences—something that was like genius—a single note struck, a tentative seeking, then the whole chord and a slow, steady building up of harmonies. He did not know what he was doing. Therein lay his power. He took things as they came to him, painted in each colour as he saw it, the red glare of the furnaces and the grey of the sodden streets and the light of a Davies's lamp on a miner's face. They were so vivid to him that he made pictures of them without effort.

And then at night, when he came back, the taking up of the history of English liberties where he had left off—

Grotesque—almost laughable.

At odd times he read up the records of Ivonrood and the Valley and the history of her people. This and that ancestor came under his survey. He discussed them gravely, acutely. She saw him browsing among the old volumes, gathering up the threads that led to her innermost life.

It was much more than the record of his stewardship. It was the record of a quest, deliberately undertaken, passionately carried through. It was not enough to succeed materially. He had to stand beside her in equality of vision. Yet he knew the futility of a painfully acquired culture "If I do not love these things

with all my heart, they can never belong to me. But I love them and have the right to seek them."

So he had set out, gallantly enough.

She went with him on that journey. She could not help herself. Somehow he had trapped her into that companionship. She saw him batter down each treasure-house in turn, and felt the mounting of an enthusiasm, a joy of discovery and possession that was almost primitive in its strength. His gladness over some faded historical event, some line of poetry that a bored and satiated world had sucked dry and tossed aside as banal and out-worn, touched and humbled her. The cockney soldier was finding the things that she had lost. He gave them back to her, re-vitalized with the youth and unspoiledness of his emotion. There were passages from the Bible that he quoted in a kind of shaken ecstasy:

"I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith."

"If I could only say that at the end," he had added simply.

She could see him then, writing, with tears in his eyes.

Underneath this spiritual life were the hard realities of his task, their unexpected bitterness. His meeting with Powys and the tragic irony of their conflict moved her dangerously. She remembered how he had felt about Powys, his queer clinging to the man whom he had saved. She remembered inevitably all that he had endured to live and to come back to her. He had promised to come back and he had kept his promise. And then she had failed him. There was no other explanation. For when had he faltered or failed her in any of the things that mattered?

She saw how the Valley began to absorb him. He began to love it, but with a love that was different to her own. To her it had been a proud achievement; to him it was a monstrous upheaval and confusion, as terrible as war, as rich with potentialities. It was a birth-place, torn with the cries and agony of birth, and what was born there might be a monster or a saviour.

She traced in him the rising of a new conception of his duty. She went with him down through the dismal streets. She heard the singing of the drunken, god-seeking women, and the howling of the mob. He carried her off her feet in that scene in the Mission Hall. She suffocated with him in the poisonous damps of the collapsing shaft. He had made his entries immediately on his return and they were stark and grim with reality. His sentences grew shorter, more tense. But they had lost their crudity. Something of the fineness of the things among which he lived were in his thoughts and lent their expression a new dignity and power. The man seemed to be growing under her eyes. She felt him stretch and lift himself to the light in the joy of growth.

Came the slow dawning of his personal disaster, the recognition of the perverseness and madness of the course on which he had been set, the perception of a conflict on which he was to wreck himself. She fought against him there. She no longer wished to follow him. But he held her and would not let her go. She went with him up through the familiar straggling graveyard. She endured with him the despair and loneliness of that hour. She knew a moment's terror that was like a blaze of revelation on her own heart.

She saw Old Hughie, looking past him down into the Valley.

He told her of things that sickened her—of men and women dying without help—of bodies waiting in the congested sick-rooms, of children playing and sleeping in the midst of death. Then again there was grim humour in his encounters with Morrison and his following. Somehow amidst it all he kept his balance. But he forced her to see Black Valley as he saw it. He could not spare her. He showed her that for him there was no real choice. And yet she felt the whole passion and grief of his decision and something of the final serenity.

"I've come to it at last. There are bigger things at stake than our happiness or even what people will call my honour. I have to do what I believe is right, trusting to God that it is the right——"

The actual diary ended there. The rest was a terse, closely argued plan for the re-organization and re-construction of the Valley. He swept Ivonrood and the interests of his family aside as ruthlessly as he had swept himself and his own happiness. "Nothing matters but the relations of our people to one another. If we cannot find unity amongst ourselves, then the men who are dead died for nothing. But if we solve this problem, each man offering up his personal interests as they offered their lives, then we shall complete the work which they began."

The plans included estimates and sketches for the homes that were to be built immediately on the site of the old Pitts Court.

That was like him. He had gone to war in just that way, dreaming, whilst he learnt the intricacies of a machine-gun.

Afterwards, on the first page of the manuscript, she

found the dedication "To my wife." Otherwise he did not once address himself directly to her. But she understood. It was, nevertheless, his call to the old comradeship. Not from lack of chivalry had he written, but because he believed in God, in her and in the rightness of the force that had united them.

3

The room was a silent history of the man. Its careless well-worn comfort, its atmosphere warmly scented with the smoke of fine cigars, its trophies of war and jungle sport expressed a temper that was itself a blend of luxuriousness and stoicism. A man who knew and loved the best in life and could do without it.

Ursula, opening the door upon him suddenly, caught a glimpse of him that was strange to her and that she was to remember afterwards. His guests had gone to bed. He sat alone by the fire, his chin resting in his hand, and something of the expression which she had surprised lingered like a light on his face as he started up to meet her—then faded and went out.

It was as though, instantly, he knew.

But she would never forget his happiness.

"Ursula, is anything wrong—I mean, anything new? I sent up a note——"

She interrupted him.

"I was hoping and praying you would be alone, Esmé. I want you to help me. I want to get away from here at once——"

"There's no train to London before to-morrow——"

"Not to London. To Black Valley."

She saw his face grow stiff and white.

"Lord Ivonrood died in London, I understand."

"I'm not thinking of my grandfather. He doesn't need anyone. Adam has sent for me——"

"Your husband——" Nothing in him could have been more tragic than that futile ejaculation. He made a movement as though he would have caught hold of her. But his hand dropped. "You can't go to-night. It's not possible——"

"Are you sure? Is there no way?"

So headlong and callous was her temper in that moment that she swept him off his feet. He had the railway guide from the shelf before he realized what he was doing. Then he put the book down resolutely and coolly.

"Wait one moment, Ursula. One minute more or less won't matter. Why are you going back? I think I have the right to know."

"Grandfather is dead. There's all that sickness and trouble in the Valley. It's my responsibility."

"It's for that then——"

"Adam is in the thick of it. I'm going to take my share with him."

"You mean he's made a mess of things. You're going to stand by out of pity—a mistaken sense of chivalry——"

She shook her head.

"Out of envy, I think."

"And this evening—does that stand for nothing?"

"I've got to ask you to release me from that, Esmé."

She was brutal. She could not help herself. There was something elemental driving her. It had been like that in Paris when she had ridden rough-shod over them all. She couldn't even pity him.

"Of course—of course I release you."

He began to study the Bradshaw. She could, at

least, admire. She had a feeling, terrible in its detachment, that she had stabbed him and that he was dying slowly, without a sign.

"There's no train," he said. "It would be a wretched cross-country journey at any time. The only sensible thing to do is to go up to London in the morning and start afresh. You could be in the Valley the next morning."

"Where is the nearest junction where I could pick up to-morrow's express?"

"Ashton, I believe."

"How many miles?"

"I don't know. Roughly, a hundred and fifty."

"Will you lend me your car, Esmé?"

He looked at her. The old, headstrong, gallant Ursula.

"I'll drive you——"

"No—no. I won't have you do that."

"Please——a last favour——"

His mouth was relaxed, now, in a faint smile that turned her sick with pain. She caught his hand in hers. It was ice-cold. She pressed it against her breast, as though it were some dying thing. His smile remained, still and very tender.

"Esmé—Esmé—it's the saddest—saddest thing in the world. And I'm utterly in the wrong, as usual. But the wrong was done this evening—not now. I must have been beside myself to realize that I was going against the deepest, strongest thing in me. I've got to go——"

"Are you sure? I don't want you to make another mistake. Ursula, don't delude yourself with the idea that love comes back. Once dead it's dead for good and all. It's only in fiction that people grow to love

each other a second time. There's no resurrection——"

"That's why I have to go," she answered. "That's why I am sure of myself."

He drew his hand gently away from hers.

"Then, I'll have the car round in half an hour. Wrap up well. It's going to be a long, stiff drive——"

"Esmé——"

He made a gesture that seemed to have been torn from him.

"No—no, for God's sake, dear. Don't let's talk. It's all right. I want you to be happy. I said that from the beginning. Do you think I didn't mean it?"

CHAPTER XX

1

THE Relief Committee, which had its quarters in Mr. Morton's office, consisted of the leading shop-keepers and a sprinkling of well-to-do gentry and aristocracy from out-lying districts, who had grown wise in such organizations during the war. They gathered round the disaster which swept the Valley with an eagerness that would have been ghoul-ish if it had not been so pathetic. The danger from infection and from the violence of angry, embittered men could not daunt them. They picked up their little bustling activities, their little schemes and ambitions and intrigues just where they had left off. People said tauntingly of their kind: "That they had enjoyed the War," and it was quite true. They had been very happy. And now they were not satisfied any longer with their old lives. They could not go back to them. They had served too long. Unconsciously, they were insisting on their right to serve.

They made Brodie think of some vast and splendid store of energy which nobody knew how to manage, and which in every-day life was always bursting out in wrong directions, wasting itself.

He dropped in on them for a few minutes on his way from one stricken quarter to another; but dearly as they would have loved to "organize" him, as their catch-phrase went, he was outside their power. He

went his own way, doing the thing nearest to his hand. All that day he had fed children whose parents were either dead or dangerously ill, had prepared bodies for burial and helped the anxious police authorities to deal with the smouldering fires of exasperation that blazed up fitfully, but with an increasing frequency. He was now stupified with exhaustion and sick at heart.

As he came out of the office-building, a man stepped up to him. It was dusk already. In the yellow murk that hung in the dank air and blurred the littered objects of the colliery yard to a ghostly indistinctness, the man's appearance was startling. It was as though one of the upstanding logs of wood had become alive—or as though all the logs were living, waiting men.

"Who is it?—oh, it's you, Samuels——"

"If you please, sir, if I could speak to you a minute——"

"Of course. Come in——"

"No, I'd rather not, if you don't mind, sir. I don't want to be seen—I only wanted to drop you a hint. I'd have a watch round your place to-night, if I was you. I've heard things——"

"What things?"

"I can't say, sir. I don't rightly know. I've caught a word here and there—by chance like. Izzy Morrison's got his gang worked up—all the young, wild fellows—and they might do anything. There's foreigners among them. Foreigners don't mind shooting when they've got the chance—and worse than shooting——"

Brodie laughed out bitterly.

"We always load the ugly business onto the foreigners," he said.

"P'raps we do, sir. And there's something in it. Foreigners ain't the same. They don't feel the same—not about our things. We don't hold with shooting one another whatever we be——"

"Even bloated capitalists like myself," Brodie suggested.

"That's what I meant, sir. It's put a lot of us off Morrison—the older, sober chaps. Even the young ones'd keep clear if they knew what they were heading for."

"Where's Powys in all this?"

The man caught the anxiety in Brodie's voice and misunderstood it.

"You don't need to worry about him. He's down and out. Fighting it for several days, they say. They don't think he'll last the night."

Brodie was silent for a moment, trying to make his tired brain realize what had been said to him. Powys—old Powys was dying—the worst obstacle to conciliation cleared out of his road. But it was hard luck, after all they'd been through together.

"I understood there's to be a meeting of your section of the men to-night at the Mission Hall," he said at last. "You're going to ballot as to whether you'll join forces with Morrison or not. I heard it as a rumour. Is it true?"

"Yes, sir. We can't go on like this. We've been drove too hard."

"Yes. I know. Will you tell the men that I shall attend their meeting? I have an offer and plans to lay before them which I think they will accept. I may be late. Tell them not to ballot till I come."

He felt the old man's eyes trying to penetrate the dusk.

"You—you are going to meet the men, sir?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell them, sir. They'll be glad enough of a chance to get things straight. But if you come you'd best have a care of yourself in the streets, sir. There'll be bitter feelings to-night, sir, if Powys goes."

"Thanks. I'll take care. It was decent of you to warn me."

Samuels did not answer. He stood there broodingly, a half-discerned, melancholy figure. But Brodie knew what lay behind that silence: a dumb, generous gratitude for a last service to the dead. He would have liked to have held out his hand, but he knew that that was against the code of the war which they were waging against one another. "There'll be better times coming for us all, Samuels."

The man spoke with a stoic grief.

"They'll come too late for me, sir."

2

And so, after all, Tom Powys was to die with the victory just out of sight. He had wanted to get back to Black Valley and to see the grass and flowers grow on the Iron Mountain as his father had seen them. He had babbled of a new heaven and a new earth. Something fine there had been at the back of his mind when he had started out from the German prison for England—something loyal and big and generous. But his brain and his body had not been strong enough. They had broken down, and he had lost his way and foundered amidst hatred and misery. If he had died out there in the German woman's cottage, it would have been better.

Adam Brodie sat beside him and waited. His own

physical weariness was such that he himself hung precariously on the edge of black and shifting illusions. Nothing had happened. The whole episode of their life and conflict in the Valley was a mirage born of fever and starvation and the desperate struggle to keep Powys going across the plain. They were really in the German attic. Only twenty miles to the frontier. But then Powys was dying and couldn't be left. Any minute the Germans might come and there would be a last fight. If he listened, he would hear the old woman downstairs, chuckling to herself.

The very events of the day leagued themselves to the deception. He recognised them as thinly disguised images of war—the pitifully masked sufferings of four horrific years, the suppressed complexes of a mind feebly struggling to save itself from madness.

Even when he started back to full consciousness, it was with no sense of relief as of waking from a nightmare. The misery of the attic had not been deeper than that of this wretched room, the heap of straw not more squalid than this poor bed with its thin and grimy coverings. Powys, dying in the enemies hands, had not seemed more tragically forsaken.

He lay there, gaunt and still, burning himself out, his lean piteous hands limp on the coverlet.

A girl who had been sitting aloof in the shadow, apathetic with grief, watching him like some beaten, helpless animal, got up and crept closer. Her subdued voice had a quality of menace.

"Better get out of here, mister. If father or Mr. Morrison was to come there'd be trouble. It ain't safe for you. I'll not answer for what might happen——"

"I'll answer for it," Brodie returned stolidly.

There was no sense in his remaining. It was reck-

less and futile. He could do nothing. He ran grave risks. But he was going to see Powys through. That determination had survived obstinately. It was instinctive—a defiance flung in the face of those things that were trying to destroy the comradeship in men.

"It mustn't happen," Brodie's thoughts ran in feverish disorder. "We've got to find a way out. We've got to prove that we mean well with one another—at all costs. Talking isn't enough."

He tried to remember something that St. Paul had said—"Though I have the tongue of angels and have not charity——"

That was it. Charity. We had to give charity a trial now or go under—the whole lot of us—in a bestial, awful orgy of destruction.

But he felt broken and beaten. He felt himself weighed down and suffocated. He was at the bottom of deep waters amidst weeds and wreckage that held him with a devilish malignity. The light was far off.

It grew colder. The girl, lost in apathy, had let the fire go out, and the mean lamp could not fight against the bitter, invading gloom. But Brodie knew that Powys' eyes were open. They were black and cavernous, but they were lifted to Brodie's face and in their depths was something that shook him from his own stupor and despair. It was an appeal—a recognition. He bent down, trying to catch the words that hung on the grey, scarcely moving lips.

"Don't you let them get me, will you, sir? Don't you go and leave me now——"

Suddenly the evil burden had let go its hold and he was striking upwards, strongly and confidently.

"I won't leave you, Powys. Of course, I won't. You might know that by this time——"

"Yes—stuck to me all through—an officer and a gentleman—must have dreamed something—only twenty miles to go——"

"I won't leave you," Brodie repeated.

A hand, child-like and pitifully familiar in its weakness and need of comfort, fumbled into his and lay there peacefully.

He heard the girl behind start up as though struck by some sudden knowledge, but she came no nearer, and presently he forgot her. He sat there motionless until, by the unearthly chill that crept up through his hand into his heart, he knew that Powys had no more need of him.

3

Old Hughie did not come back. He had heard that Tom was going to die, and had followed the doctor out into the street, muttering in unintelligible excitement. The doctor, who was a stranger in the neighbourhood and whose nerves were unstrung by days and night of incessant effort, was glad when his misshapen-looking companion broke away from him at a side street and went shambling up the hill into darkness.

Old Hughie knew where he was going. He had an appointment to keep and he went so fast that he had to wait several minutes at the great rust-eaten gates which, half-opened, led up the Avenue to Ivonrood. It was very dark too, but old Hughie could see in the dark like a cat. He saw the man come up under the shadow of the park walls long before the latter had any idea of his presence, and his sudden movement of recognition drew forth an oath of alarm and anger.

Afterwards they stood close to one another and

the stranger talked to Old Hughie, very slowly and carefully. Old Hughie said nothing, having lost the power of speech, but he could still understand and respond to certain elemental appeals. He took the square parcel that was laid in his hands and muttered over it in a kind of animal hunger.

"They put you in prison and they've killed your son," his companion said. "You've got to show them that you're a man still—put the fear of God into them."

They parted soon afterwards. Old Hughie slipped through the open gates and vanished like a wraith among the trees. Israel Morrison, evidently relieved from some anxiety, went back openly the way he had come. At the cross-roads a car with a driver and two other occupants awaited him, and in a minute he was being driven rapidly along the floor of the Valley towards the Gap. Once or twice he looked back expectantly.

"We have done good work," he said with a theatrical gesture. "We have prepared and sowed. But there are other fields. It would be unwise to await the harvest."

CHAPTER XXI

1

BEHIND her lay the bitter night—the steady pressing forward along black, unknown roads, the chill melancholy dawn breaking wanly over the frost-bound hills. Behind her too, a part of that fantastic journey, receding with it into the distance, was the life that had filled the gap between the War and now. She had the feeling of waking from a narcotic. The bright, vague beings who had played their part in that feverish dream, faded. Only Esmé Monteith, who had been there from the beginning, remained undiminished, unaltered.

He had smiled up at her through the carriage window with a heart-breaking cheerfulness. His face had been wan with the sheer physical strain of the last twenty-four hours, but there had been nothing tragic about him—nothing to suggest that they were not to meet again in a week or two.

"That was a record run, wasn't it? Just ten minutes to spare. Another puncture would have dished us. You must be all in though. Try to get some sleep. I've tipped the guard, and you'll have the carriage to yourself. There'll be a luncheon basket for you at Everest. And I won't forget the telegram." He had held her hand for a moment, but even his clasp had been restrained and cheerful and his eyes had twinkled.

"Next time I'll be a Brigadier-General with white hair and a liver and an awful temper."

He stood on the platform till she was out of sight, cap in hand, waving to her, very gallantly. But her last picture she had drawn for herself, from imagination and from her knowledge of him. It came back repeatedly to her inner vision, vivid and poignant. She saw him on that lonely return journey. She believed that even when there was no one to witness against him Esmé Monteith would not lose his firmity.

He would keep a stiff upper lip, even before himself, feeling that he owed it to her and to her happiness to make the best of what was left him.

The glowing spirit of sheer adventure kindled anew in her as they rolled through the night, northward. The lights of Penwyre flashed past in a golden stream. She felt rather than saw the great rocks of the Gap spring up on either hand like giant sentinels whom the express saluted with a shriek as it thundered into the Valley. But there the sense of familiarity ended. Even through the blurred windows of her carriage, she obtained the impression of some profound change—of disaster.

There was no one to meet her. The station itself had a discarded frightened look, as though a hurricane had torn away its grimy, bustling self-confidence. The complacent station-master and ramshackle conveyances in the yard outside had all vanished. A man whom she did not know took her ticket. Some of the street lamps had been smashed; and in the wretched light Ursula could see black groups of men who, though they could not have recognized her, fell silent as she passed. She could feel them looking after her.

One face she saw for a moment flash out at her from under a flickering gas-jet, and its morose menace startled if it did not frighten her. Physical fear she had put away from her, almost, it seemed when she had been a child. She had grappled with it for the last time that night in the Hospital. Years ago. Since then there had been another fear—the world's fear of the ennui and futility of life. But now that had gone too.

She could have sung aloud.

This was the Valley that Adam Brodie had shown her relentlessly and passionately, not the mighty industrial organization, the prodigious effort of one man; but a place of mean, ill-lit streets whose tram-lines wound like slimy snakes through a desolation of barricaded shops and wretched homes, of furtive people moving stealthily among the shadows as though hiding from an invisible, lurking terror. As she climbed the hill-road that led to Ivonrood she looked back, and where the fierce blaze of furnaces had once fed her pride and her instinctive love of vast design and brilliant colour there was now empty darkness. The Valley lay under a cloud of mourning and despair. Its glory had been stript from it like a grotesque cloth from a putrifying, terrible body.

A year ago she would have denied the truth. She faced it now with a high and sober courage. Nothing was lost. There was no need to blame too bitterly, not even the old man who had given his life to make the Valley what it was. All achievement lay through illusion and error and stupid cruelties. In the end the whole race moved forward. Now it was their turn, hers and Adam's, to play their part, to do the best

that was in them, their life long, though it might mean all that he foresaw in failure and disappointment. One day she would look back upon the Valley again with a new and finer pride.

It was of heart and body, this faith, this sense of unconquerable well-being. The joy of sheer living came rushing through her as it had once when she had set her horse, full gallop, at the masked ditches. Only now it was much more than an intoxication, a blind excitement, covering emptiness and disillusion. Tomorrow it would be no less. She lifted her eyes exultantly to the great trees of Ivonrood whose branches she could hear clashing against one another in the rising wind. It was easy to believe that they too greeted her in triumph—their old play-fellow who had come home.

But it was Alec Quinn who rose up out of the familiar dusk beyond the firelight. A grey and bitter brooding lingered in the red-rimmed eyes that blinked at her in incredulous interrogation. She held out her hand impulsively. Even in her preoccupation she saw with a pang of pity how old and broken he was.

"I'm Ursula—Adam's wife," she said. "And you're Mr. Quinn, his friend. We know each other already. Weren't you expecting me? I sent a telegram."

"It never came," he stammered. "Things are disorganized here—the sickness is terrible—one doesn't know from one hour to another——"

"I heard. I came as quickly as I could. Where is my husband? Andrews told me that he had not been home all day, but that you might know where he was. I want to find him."

"I had a telephone message an hour ago," Quinn

answered more steadily. "He is to meet the men's representatives at the Mission Hall at eight o'clock. I tried to dissuade him. It isn't safe."

She switched on the light over the writing table and looked about her. She was smiling faintly, with the arrogance of her youth and love.

"He would never care about that," she said.

She saw that on the surface nothing had been changed. He had been punctilious in his stewardship. The very order of the furniture had been maintained. He did not know that he had poured into their antiquity the vigour and wealth of his own spirit. She could feel his presence on every side. It filled her with a sweet content to touch his various possessions strewn about the table, the pen, the open book, the old pipe, lying there as he had left them. They were not strangers among these old, familiar things—not aliens. They had their place here. They had been accepted.

And suddenly she thought that if, indeed, her grandfather had come back, he, too, in the wider vision of death, would be content.

Something of all she felt shone out of her. To Alec Quinn it was as though a strong, warm light had come into the room.

"He is very brave," he said haltingly, "a brave man, and I think, a great one. I have watched him grow—just in these few months."

"He has told me about you—how you helped him."

He made a little deprecating gesture.

"I shall be glad to remember that."

"You speak as though you were going away," Ursula said intently. "But we need you. You are to help us in all we mean to do here. Adam wrote to me

about a school—a wonderful new school. Didn't you know?"

"Yes. We've talked it over together. But it is not for me. I made up my mind—just now. I have not the right—nor the courage, nor the faith. You must find a younger, better man. I—I have been greatly troubled for him, Mrs. Brodie. It has been a hard and lonely fight."

Their eyes met, and this time his did not waver.

"You mean that I failed him?"

"I mean that he could not have come through without you."

"I am going to him now."

"Not alone. You will let me accompany you to the Hall, at least. Believe me, it is not safe——"

"I'm not afraid either." And then with passionate feeling, "I wish it wasn't safe—I'd like it to be dangerous—to run risks—to take my share."

Some instinct made her look back. She could see the light burning in the room which she had just left, but it was too dark to make out more than the outline of the house. It loomed behind her, a shadow against the night. And she had a moment of sorrow, not poignant, but full of tenderness such as touches those who look back on their own childhood.

Then she went on.

There were men coming up the Avenue. She could hear the tramp of feet, a menacing undertone of the wind. A multitude of men. They were carrying lanterns and torches. She could see the lights dance madly as they stumbled among the ruts and the long banners of fire streaming against the night. Women too—shrill and angry-voiced.

She stopped short, recognizing a danger that at the least threatened her purpose. All the bitterness and misery that she had felt eddying about her in the streets had been cunningly swept together in a torrent that was to fling itself against Ivonrood. A year ago she would have stood in its path, defied its insolent aggression from sheer pride. But not now. She understood too much. Ivonrood itself had become insignificant.

She turned off from the main avenue. There was a path among the trees which she had worn for herself as a child and she could have found it blindfolded. She turned down it, the trunks of the great oaks rising up in black massive pillars between her and the lurid heavily-flowing stream. It grew quieter as she ran on, and presently the stillness was unbroken save for the wind overhead and once by a gliding, furtive sound as though someone else, hiding in the darkness, had slipped past her.

2

"We were together all through—he was a fine soldier—a brave man."

The girl did not answer. She looked at him steadily with her hopeless eyes, and he realized that it was of no use—that she knew. He had not wanted her to know. He did not want anything that might hurt or belittle the dead man.

"You see, he had forgotten me," he explained.

But her silence was impregnable, and at last he opened the door and went out.

He believed in life. Even in the face of this tragic—the more tragic because it was so commonplace

and insignificant in the face of the War and of the cynical and rampant egotism of men and nations that was rising from the battle-fields like a wave of putrefication—he believed in an ultimate purpose, an ultimate good.

It was for men to hold to their vision and not to be afraid.

He was glad to be alive and to take his part. He felt strong and at peace. Whatever happened now he knew that he would be able to endure. Reality had tested him. He had learnt that the haunting terror in men's hearts was not of trial but of themselves. They were afraid that when loss or pain or death came to them they would break down shamefully. But when they had once met suffering and had overcome it they became free.

He had gone out into the world from his father's shop with a head full of romantic dreams, and War had buffeted him and peace had humiliated him and made fun of him. But the dreams had remained undaunted. They had thrown their light over the bitterness of experience and had grown with his own growth. They had come to embrace other destinies than that of Adam Brodie. He believed in them. He meant to build them on firm ground.

He had failed often enough. He had done weak and stupid things. But he had never been really beaten. After each miserable blunder he had picked himself up and gone on, stronger and more confident. The things that had hurt and frightened him would never be able to hurt or frighten him again. It was strange to think he had ever cared so much about being a gentleman or that he should have suffered hours of sick shame because he had dropped an "h" before the

Setons. As though that sort of thing really mattered—even to them. Even they had not really been concerned with his “h’s” or his gentlemanliness. It was the fear in him which they had despised.

He knew that when Ursula came the last barrier between them would have gone down. He knew that she would come, sooner or later. •The certainty had grown with his love for her which, like the roots of a great thirsty tree, had thrust down deeper and deeper, winding themselves round every fibre of his being. It had been just one of those weaknesses that he should ever have thought that Monteith might take his place in her life. Their mating had been much more than the act of a blundering instinct of sex and youth. They were the blessed in life—a man and woman who belonged to each other in body and spirit. And Ursula would have learnt that truth too, in her loneliness, as he had done.

The Mission Hall lamp shone like a Crusader’s banner. It reminded him of that other night which had marked the turning point in his relations to the Valley—when he had stood at the cross-roads, choosing the way that he was to follow henceforth. But now the street was empty and silent, and only Samuels stood at the side-entrance to meet him.

“We’ve been mighty anxious about you, sir. It’s been a sight too quiet. We were afraid the roughs might have gone up to Ivonrood.”

“They may have done,” Brodie said. “I haven’t been there. I’ve been with Powys. I was with him when he died.”

“You, sir?”

“Yes. He and I were old comrades. He had for-

gotten me, but just before the end he remembered. Are the other men here?"

"Yes, sir. I gave them your message. They're waiting. And I'm told there's a young lady in the secretary's room, sir. She asked if you would see her before you went in—I think it's Miss Seton—I beg pardon—your wife."

For one moment he stood there, his face bloodless. He had felt his heart check and leap forward like a cruelly reined-in horse. He had been sure that she would come, and yet now he staggered under the shock of her coming—under the sense of her nearness.

As he was thrust aside, Samuels heard a sound like a broken cry of triumph:

"I know it is."

She had heard his step in the corridor and turned to face him. In the dingy, sparsely-furnished room she was the very spirit of brave, adventuring life. Yet she looked wan, too, and disheveled as he had seen her after nights and days in an agony-stifled ward—and happy with that same proud, conquering happiness which had carried them through the storm.

They met each other halfway across the room, hand locked in hand. In that moment they had no need of passionate gestures that had been often enough the desperate disguises of their disunion. Their spirits had come together on high ground, face to face.

She saw him changed. Life had worked on him with her rough genius and had carved away the clumsy lines of mind and body, leaving the essential man, whom Ursula, in an hour of inspiration, had recognized and loved.

They stood close to one another, in silence, held

by a sense of utter peace. It was as though they had travelled a long way over a bitter sea, in the teeth of the wind and adverse tides, and had at last dropped anchor side by side, in a great harbour. It did not seem strange that they should put away all explanation, all protestation. There was no thought of compromise or of adjustment. In silence and loneliness they had been welded together finally.

"I came at once," she said. "I've travelled night and day. I went to Ivonrood first and they told me you were here. I wanted to be in time—to help if I could—to let you know I was standing by——"

"And I've been waiting for you."

"You knew I'd come, didn't you?"

"Yes—I was sure. I didn't worry about it."

"And my grandfather?"

"I heard an hour ago."

Her hand tightened on his.

"He's free—and we're free, too, Adam. I've thought it out—we mustn't doubt, or feel that we're not playing fair by him. He meant to do the best he could for the country—and for the Valley. But he was an old man and he had lost touch. He didn't understand the new good that has come out of the War—but we're young, Adam—we know—and we can carry——" She paused and then went on unsteadily, "I've had a frightful nightmare lately—it's haunted me. I've dreamed over and over again that I was sorry the War was over—that I wanted it to come back, to have a chance to do things again—and to do them better. It was terrible. I used to wake sick with horror at myself—and yet I understand how it was. It was like being in prison and feeling you'd blow it up with everybody in it—just to get out of the four walls. And then when you wrote, I

saw there was another way—that's what I want to tell you first. I believe in you. I want to do what seems best to you to bring peace to us all. I don't care how long it takes or what it costs. I want nothing for myself but the right to share with you——"

"I'm going in to the men now," he said. "I'll tell them—you shall tell them——"

But as he turned towards the inner room a sound fell in the distance, muffled and ominous and familiar. It touched an instinct that four years of hourly peril had grafted in them—the recognition of a blinding, striking death.

He swung round, and the next instant they were in each other's arms, clinging to one another.

Samuels stood at the violently opened door, and behind were a crowd of aghast faces. But they were turned from the two standing together, to the window which suddenly had become blood red.

"Sir—I'm afraid—something terrible—at Ivon-rood."

3

Alec Quinn had gone back to his chair by the fire. He moved stiffly and painfully like a very old man. He felt incredibly old. To be old is, after all, to be finished with life, to be weary of it, and to have lost touch with youth. To Alec Quinn it was as though the last thread of emotion that bound him to other men had broken. He was tired—tired above all of himself. His isolation of soul was beginning to create in him a sense of nausea and disgust. He recognized it as a foul disease. He had only one desire now—to escape.

His work here was finished. Adam and his wife would go on together. He was glad that they were happy, but even his gladness was a withered thing. He would have liked to get away now, but even his body seemed incapable of action.

He was like a dead man already.

He heard the coming of the mob, at first with indifference, then with the shrinking detestation with which the mass of men inspired him. He felt himself grimace and draw back deeper into himself as though from contamination. The threat in their harsh voices did not frighten him. He had always been impervious to bodily fear. But contempt, the last emotion of which he seemed capable, was rising in him like gall.

From the howl which flooded against the walls of the house, lashing itself into fury, he distinguished separate cries.

"Come out and face the music."

"The dirty hound, he daren't."

"Powys—Powys."

"They've killed him."

"We'll make them pay for that."

"Come out and we'll talk to you, Mr. Adam Brodie."

Quinn's lips twisted into a sneer. The contemptible herd that was always ready to tear down anyone nobler than itself! A stone crashed through the window and he stirred angrily. If they were allowed to go on, they might damage something precious. It maddened him to think of the power that lay in these dirty hands.

The old man-servant opened the door, thrusting into the shadow a white and staring face.

"If you please, Mr. Quinn, hadn't you better telephone? They're up to something terrible. Someone

has got into the cellars. I heard him moving. I'm afraid."

"Absurd," Quinn muttered. "If you're afraid—get out. They're as cowardly as they're noisy." He got up as he spoke and went over to the window. He could see nothing but the lanterns dancing like mad fireflies; but he himself stood out, a sharply-cut shadow against the light. The cries became a stupifying roar, bestial and cruel.

"Better be careful, Mr. Quinn. They think you're Mr. Brodie. They're up to mischief. They say their leader is dead, and they blame him for it."

"They blame him!" Quinn echoed contemptuously. He unlatched the window and tore it open. He had no plan—no idea of what he was going to do. He obeyed an impulse. Amidst his fretful anger there was now something new—a glimmer of full-blooded passionate emotion.

He began to shout.

"You don't know what you're doing. You are mad and misled. The man you're hounding down is worth a hundred of that make-believe, bragging hero who owed his life to him."

His voice was thin and high-pitched. It squeaked and cracked pitifully. Its powerlessness filled him with shame. But he persisted, repeating what he had said over and over again until in one of those sudden lulls which come upon the wildest crowds, they heard him.

"I tell you Major Brodie saved Powys's life at the risk of his own."

The sheer audacity of such a statement held them for a moment longer. Then someone laughed, the ugly, galling laugh of mob fury. But he had had his

chance. The lull had lasted long enough to have caught the hearing of those nearest him. He was himself as a soldier who has won a few yards of ground and is holding it desperately against the assault of a surprised and furious enemy. A moment's weakening and he would be swept under.

He told the story of that escape. It was strange that out of his arid, weary mind he could call forth such images of suffering and endurance. He felt, running through his dry veins, a never-before experienced joy of living. He had torn off the drab dress of an aloof pedant and stood out in the arena, fighting for a cause he loved, humanly and passionately.

He knew that he could win. The barrage of savage interruption was lifting. The circle of silence widened.

"He could have escaped. There was only twenty miles to go. He had everything to go back to that makes a man desire to live. But Powys depended on him and he was of heroic stuff——"

"Lies—lies—stop him—put a bullet through him."

"He would not shame an old comrade. He preferred to keep silence. But there are others who have known the truth and would have told it."

Something flashed under the trees. He noticed it because it was quite a different light from the rest—brief and vicious. He felt almost simultaneously a dull blow which though it did not hurt him seemed to stagger the very foundations of his being. He knew at once, without knowing how he knew, that he had to be quick.

"You have the proof of him in your midst. He went down the shaft that night simply to share your danger. He faced death from your violence and from infection without hesitation. He gave every ounce of his

strength to your welfare. He has been ready to lay down his life for the least of you——"

Suddenly the silence became absolute. He was aware of a tremendous change that was quite close to him. For one thing he could see their faces—blank and staring, white with an horrific glare which he realized was spreading out from behind him. He heard a woman's scream.

"Oh God—oh God."

There was a roar as of an exploding gun.

"An air raid," Alec Quinn thought. "An air raid—but it's absurd—the war's over."

He staggered back into the room. He had a vague idea that he ought to tell the people to take cover. His resentment against them had quite gone. The sense of kinship which had come to him amidst the trainful of soldiers flooded over him. Then it struck him how ironical it was that he, a conscientious objector, should be killed by an enemy bomb. Because evidently the house had been struck. He was met at the doorway by a blaze of fire. The predominating influence of his life arrested itself for the last time. He ran back and began tearing down the books and pictures, throwing them from the window. He could hear someone shouting:

"Jump, you fool, jump."

But he went on with his futile, desperate task. He knew now that he was dying. It gave him infinite satisfaction to be dying in action—like a man.

They saw the blaze from the steps of the Mission Hall. And all through the night one solitary man watched it from the heights above the Valley. Old Hughie, at the edge of the great bluff, made strange

gestures of exultation that were like the dance of death of some mysterious highpriest. And as the red scar spread out in a final burst of splendour, he plunged forward with his arms outspread, as though embracing the whole Valley.

4

It was almost morning. The ruins that had been Ivonrood still smouldered, but their sinister glow had begun to fade into the unearthly light that was coming from the east. The shadows of men, aghast and silent, moved furtively among the trees. There was nothing to save now. The violence that they had demanded had been given them in full measure, and they shrank from it as from an accursed thing.

A man and a woman stood apart on a rising of the ground from which they could overlook the disaster and the Valley beyond, wrapt in black and solemn suspense. Their grief left them unshaken. For Ursula it had in it the elements of serenity such as women had felt when Victory had come to their people over the bodies of their sacrifice.

They stood hand in hand.

"We shall build on the old foundations," Adam Brodie said, "something finer."

THE END

